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TEMPLARS GET PAPAL PARDON

700-year-old 'lost' document revealed

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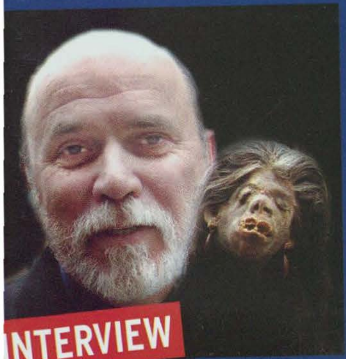

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MAN WITH THE SHRUNKEN HEAD

Inside Ripley's 'Believe it or Not!'

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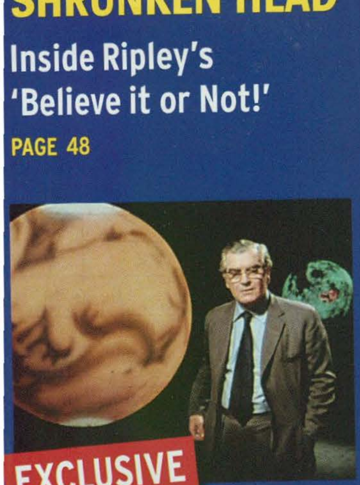

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Behind the scenes of the classic television hoax

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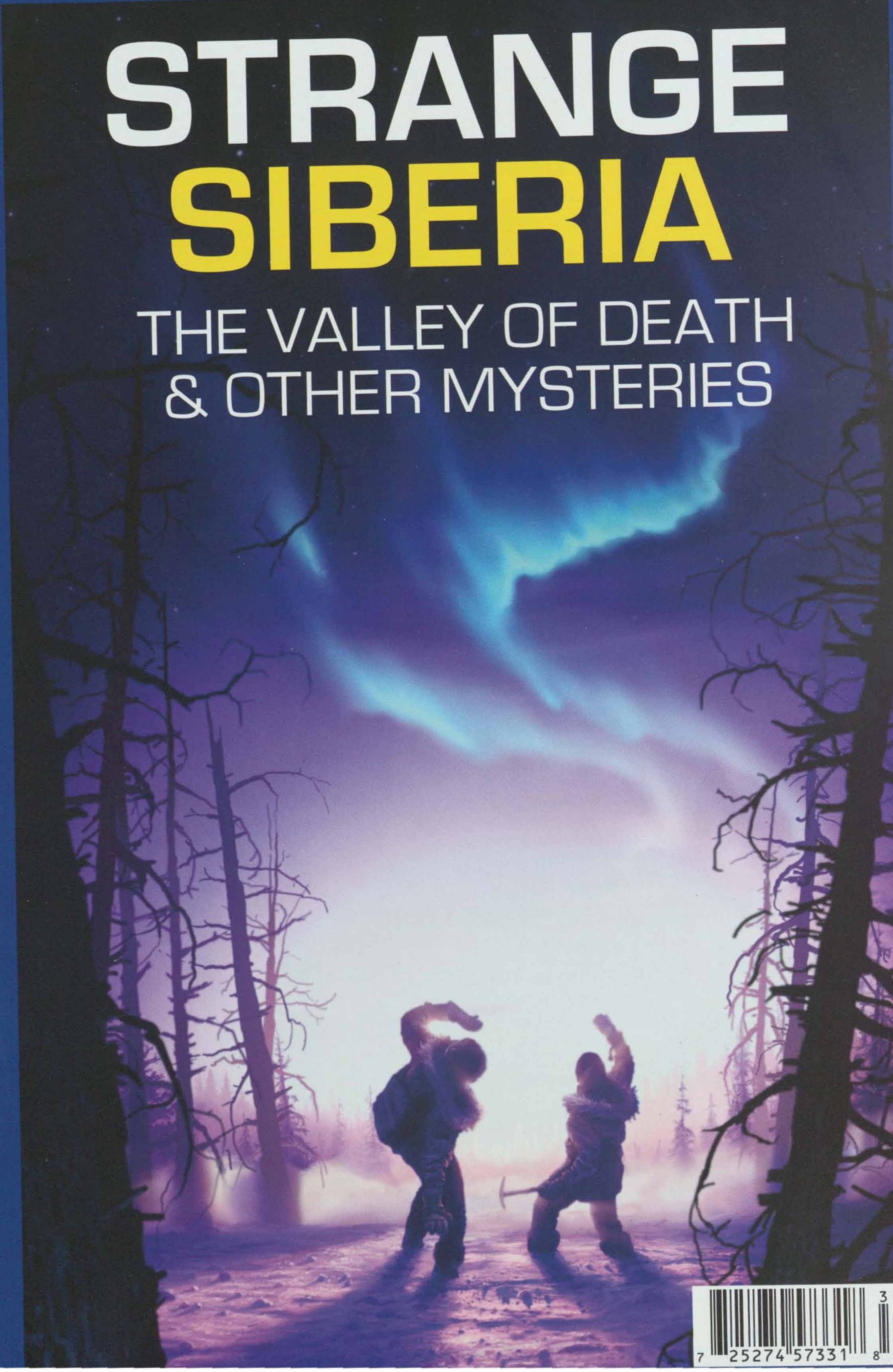

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SEARCH FOR THE SHRUNKEN HEADS
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Believe It or Not!

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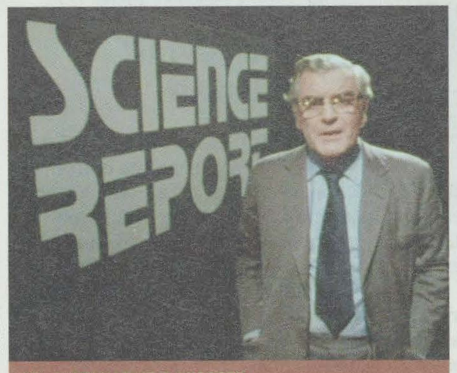

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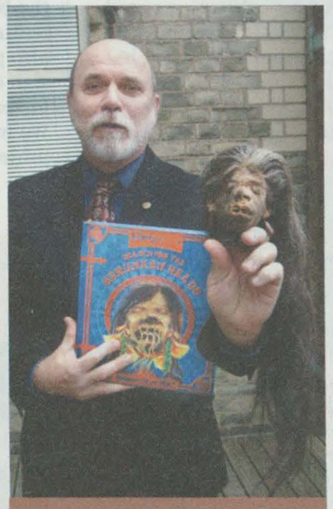

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OTHER COVER CREDITS: *Alternative 3* photo: CHRISTOPHER MILES

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strange days

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Since it shocked British audiences in 1977, *Alternative 3* has been a gift to conspiracy theorists everywhere. Director Christopher Miles breaks a long silence and talks about the broadcast to **STEVE MARSHALL** in an exclusive interview for *Fortean Times*.

48 THE MAN WITH THE SHRUNKEN HEAD

For nearly 30 years, **EDWARD MEYER** has been the modern-day successor to Robert Ripley, cataloguing, maintaining and expanding Ripley Entertainment's empire of oddities. To mark the publication of a new book mapping Ripley's voyages around the world, he talked to **DAVID SUTTON** about his career, the collections he oversees and about Ripley himself.

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editorial

Believe It Or Not!

Explorers and Entertainers

It had been quite a while since we'd heard from intrepid Czech explorer Ivan Mackerle – who had last shared with us his adventures in **FT150:50–51** – so we were pleased when he got in touch recently to tell us about his latest expedition to the far-flung Siberian taiga, an inhospitable and mysterious region with more than its fair share of odd, and sometimes alarming, stories. Ivan's aim was to try and find the seemingly unnatural dome-like structures – sometimes called 'cauldrons' – reported by a number of travellers in the Yakutia region over the years. Did he and his team – with their limited resources and up against some pretty rough weather – find these mysterious structures? Turn to p34 to find out.

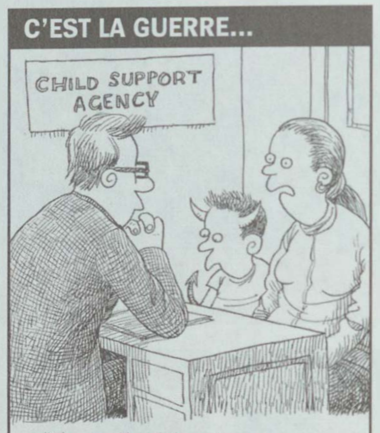
Another notable traveller – one who became a worldwide celebrity on the basis of his trips to the four corners of the Earth in search of oddities – was Robert Ripley, the man behind the phenomenon that became *Ripley's Believe It Or Not!* (*BION!*) But, as Edward Meyer, Vice President of Exhibits and Archives for Ripley's, explained to us on his recent visit to London (see pp48–51), Ripley was no Indiana Jones, his exploits being carefully prearranged, complete with luxurious travel, whether he was voyaging to New Guinea or searching for shrunken heads in the forests of Ecuador.

It's interesting to note that while Charles Fort was collecting his masses of data, Ripley was likewise assembling the thousands of curious factoids that ensured his column was read by millions around the world. The flamboyant Ripley, hobnobbing with politicians and celebrities and becoming rich and famous as a result of the popularity of his column and the presentation of his oddities in print, radio, film and museums, enjoyed the sort of life that Fort, if he'd ever dreamt of it, probably wouldn't have much cared for.

Oddly enough, while Fort was labouring quietly away in the New York Public Library, Ripley's star researcher (and the unsung hero of *BION!*) Norbert Pearlroth was at work every day in the very same building. If Fort and Pearlroth's paths ever crossed, there's no record of it; perhaps more surprisingly, Fort appears never to have mentioned Ripley, even though his voracious appetite for newspapers must have meant that he was aware of the *BION!* columns, which were enjoying huge success by the time of Fort's death in 1932. While their approaches to their subject were, of course, quite different – Fort the sedentary philosopher of the anomalous, Ripley the globe-trotting Liberace of the strange – our readers will appreciate that weirdness can be enjoyed as much for its pure entertainment value as for its wider philosophical ramifications; here at *FT*, we strive for a comfortable balance.

Older forteans may remember the broadcast of the notorious mockumentary *Alternative 3* back in 1977, an occasion which provided a television equivalent of Orson Welles's *War of The Worlds* radio broadcast, fooling a host of viewers into believing it was all true and leading to a furore over the programme's clever erosion of the line between fact and fiction. If ever a broadcast should have been prefaced with the words 'Believe it or Not!', this was surely it! We're delighted that director Christopher Miles has broken his usual silence on the subject and in this issue shares with us the story of *A3*'s genesis, production and stormy reception (see pp42–47).

C'EST LA GUERRE...



"Ah yes, the father. That's where you might have a problem."

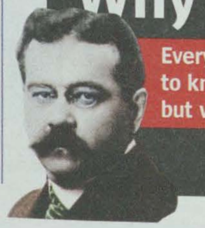
Au revoir, Alistair

We'd like to bid a fond farewell to our online editor Alistair Strachan, who, after doing such a wonderful job of running the *Fortean Times* website for many years is moving on to pastures new. Alistair will be best known to the users of www.forteantimes.com, many of whom will have got to know him over the years. Alistair was always there to sort out online problems, deal with requests for help or information (however odd) and keep the site running efficiently, making sure that everything from the breaking news stories to the reviews and features were as up-to-date as possible. He also put in much hard work on the recent redesign of the site, and leaves us having created a forteantimes.com much improved in every way. We wish him the very best of luck in future projects.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING



Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

STAR WARS
Who says an evil tyrant can't change?
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

ANIMAL SPIRITS
The cats and dogs that are haunting the nation's taverns
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THE MERRY MUGGER
Gunman invades family meal, but after some wine, asks for a hug
PAGE 22

IG NOBEL PRIZES
More research that can't or shouldn't be replicated
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Vatican absolves Templars

Document reveals that the Holy See judged the Knights Templar guilty of abuse – but not heresy

REUTERS / ALESSANDRO BIANCHI

LEFT: A replica of one of the seals used by the inquistors in 1308.

The entire documentation of the heresy trial of the Knights Templar (a mediæval Christian military order) was published on 25 October, 700 years and 12 days after the initial accusations against the order. Only 799 copies of the 300-page leather-bound volume, *Processus Contra Templarios* (Trial against the Templars), complete with replicas of the wax seals used by the inquisitors, are for sale at 5,900 euro; an 800th copy will go to Pope Benedict XVI. In addition to sheiks and libraries, individual collectors, Templar associations and cultural organisations around the world have reserved copies, though about 300 are still available, according to Ferdinando Santor, president of the publisher, Scrinium.

The book includes the "Parchment of Chinon" from the year 1308, discovered by Barbara Frale in the Vatican's secret archives in 2001. This shows that Pope Clement V absolved the Templar leaders of heresy, though he did find them guilty of immorality and planned to reform the order. However, under pressure from Philippe le Bel (King Philip IV of France), Clement later reversed his decision and suppressed the order in 1312. "For 700 years," said Frale, "we have believed that the Templars died as cursed men, and this absolves them."

Frale said the 3ft (90cm)-wide Chinon parchment probably had been ignored because a catalogue entry in 1628 was too vague. She was intrigued by the entry because, while it apparently referred to some minor matter, it noted that three top cardinals, including Pope Clement's right-hand man, Bérenger Fredol, had made a long journey to interrogate someone. "Going on with my research, it turned out that in reality it was an inquest of very great importance," she said. Fredol "had gone to question the Grand Master and other heads of the Templars who had been segregated, practically kidnapped, by the king of France and shut up in secret in his castle in Chinon on the Loire." (Chinon is actually on the River Vienne, a branch of the Loire.)

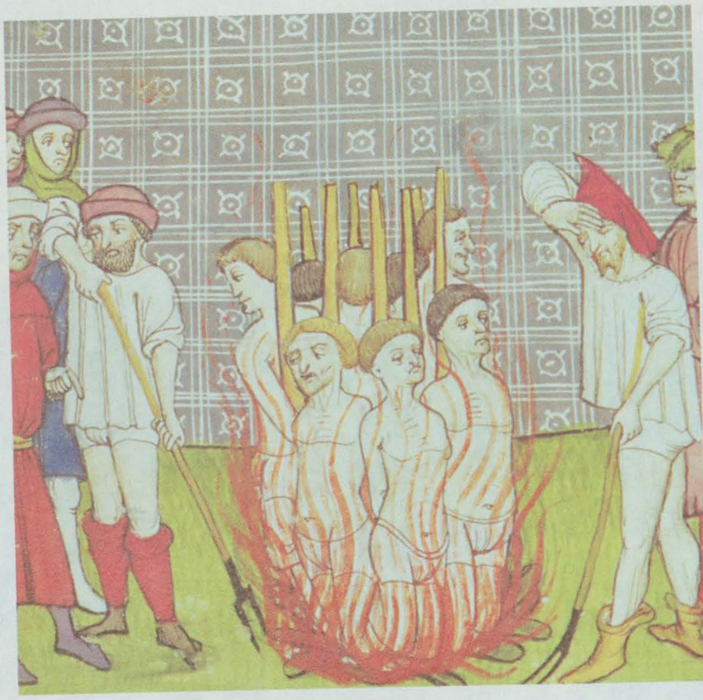
As for Clement, he "was a hostage in French territory" on the eve of what historians would call the Avignon period of popes, Frale said. The parchment reveals the Pope's conclusion that the Templars were guilty of abuses but not heresy. These abuses included forcing new recruits to "reject Christ in words and spit on the cross". They also had to kiss the lower back, navel and mouth of the man proposing them. The Templars explained that the initiation mimicked the humiliation that knights could suffer if they fell into the hands of the Saracens, while the kissing ceremony was a sign of their total obedience.

The full name of the order is *Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici* (Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon). Founded by Hugues de Payns in 1119 in Jerusalem to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land after the First Crusade, its headquarters were in the Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount, which lent the Templars their name. The Pope exempted the order from local laws and taxes and made it answerable to no one but the pontiff. As its military might increased, it also grew in wealth, acquiring property throughout Europe and running an early banking system, with the equivalent of cheques or promissory notes to save pilgrims or crusaders the risk of having to carry large amounts of silver or gold with them.

The Templars' secrecy gave rise to many fanciful legends

The Templars left the Middle East with the collapse of the Crusader kingdoms. Their secrecy later gave rise to numerous fanciful legends, for instance that they guarded the Holy Grail (see pp54–55), the Ark of the Covenant, the Shroud of Turin, or fragments of the True Cross. Recently, the Templars have featured in such flimflammery as *The Da Vinci Code* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.*

Historians believe King Philip owed debts to the Templars and used the accusations to arrest their leaders in 1307 and extract, under torture, confessions of heresy in order to seize the order's riches. The last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, was burned at the stake in 1314 and the surviving monks fled. Some were absorbed by other orders, and over the centuries, various groups have claimed to be descended from the Templars. Their mystique began to influence aspects of Freemasonry in the mid-18th century, and there have been several masonic and non-masonic Orders of the Temple since then, none of them having any actual connection with the original Knights Templar. Some of the Templars' land in London was rented out to lawyers – hence the Inner Temple, Temple Bar, etc. south of the Royal Courts of Justice. *D.Telegraph, 5 Oct; [AP,R] 12+25 Oct; Independent, 26 Oct 2007. For more on the Chinon Parchment, see,* http://asv.vatican.va/en/doc/1308.htm. *There's a "rough translation" at www.inrebus.com/chinon.php.*


FACING PAGE: *Burning of the Templars*, c.1308 (vellum), French School, (14th century).

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EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Plankton trial gets under way

Irish Independent, 3 May 2007.

Invasive aliens advance with more success than 1960s mercenaries

Irish Times, 8 May 2007.

Villagers get their harlot back

Irish Independent, 14 April 2007.

Cheating piranhas in 3,000-mile Amazon swim

Guardian, 9 April 2007.

Big-nosed cop missing from yard

San Jose Mercury News, 29 Dec 2006.

Thumb eating joiner insane

(Wolverhampton) Express & Star, 5 April 2007.

Zombies are set to revive Sixties music

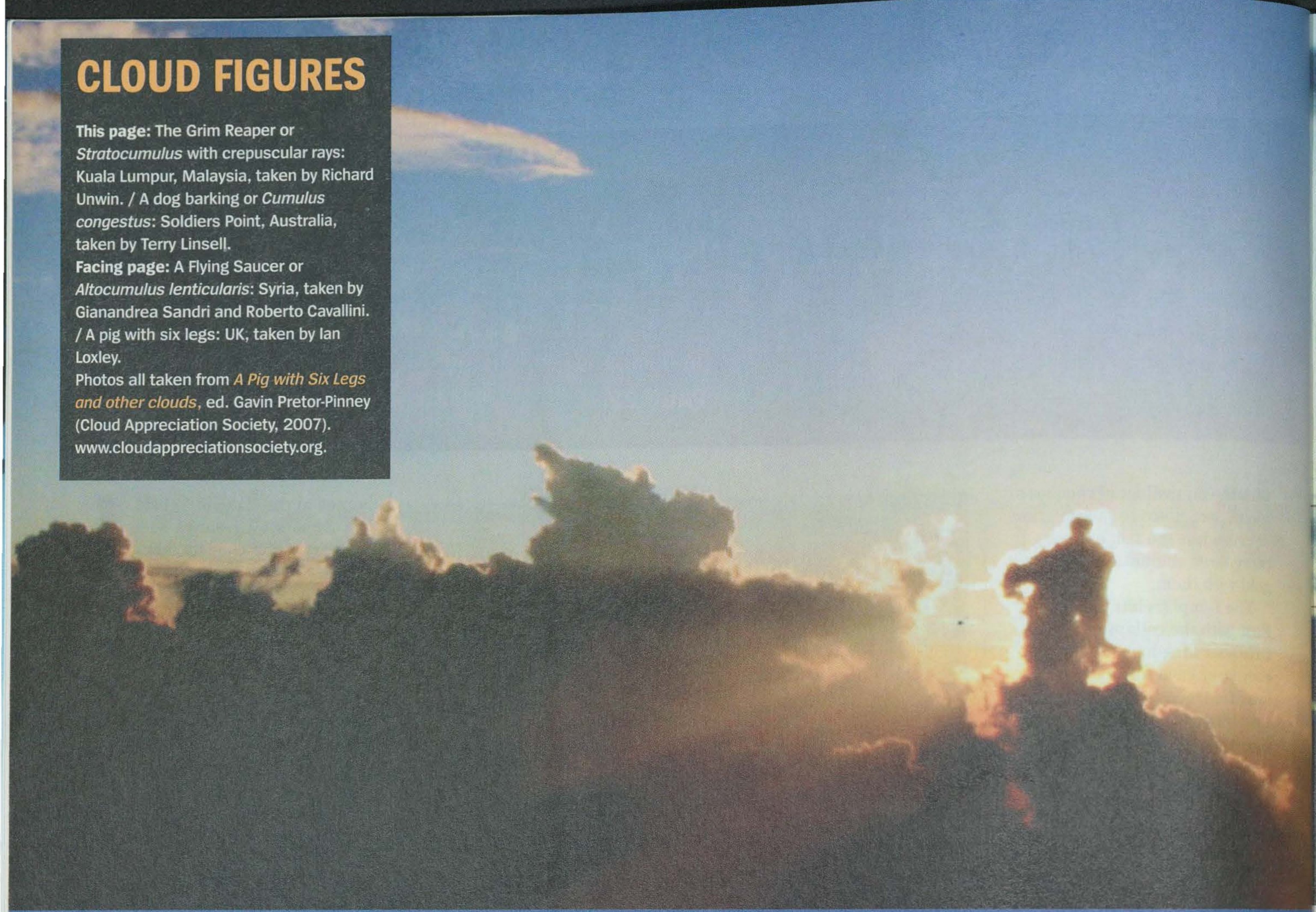
Yorkshire Eve. Post, 21 April 2007.

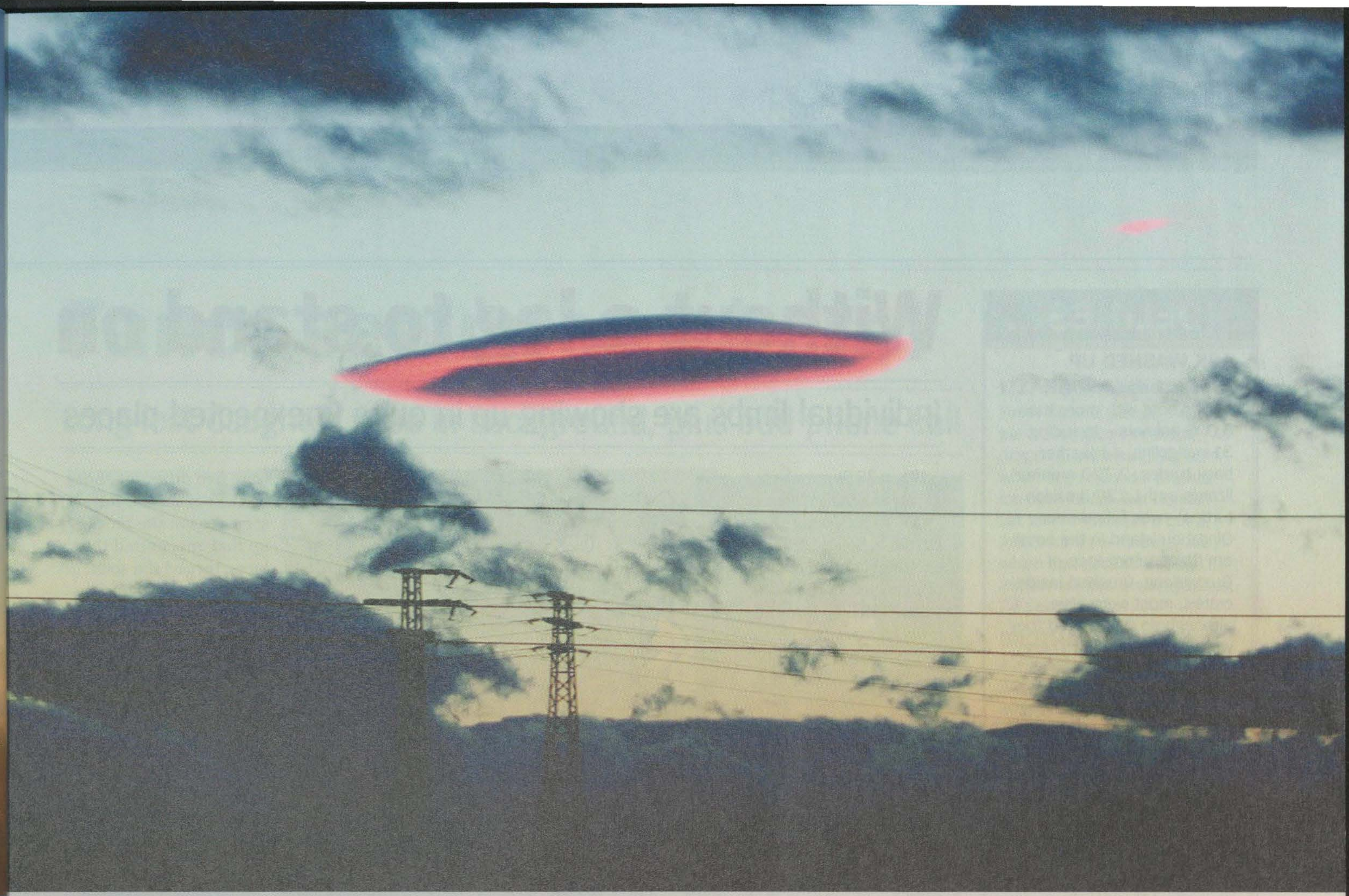
They're changing sex at Buckingham Palace

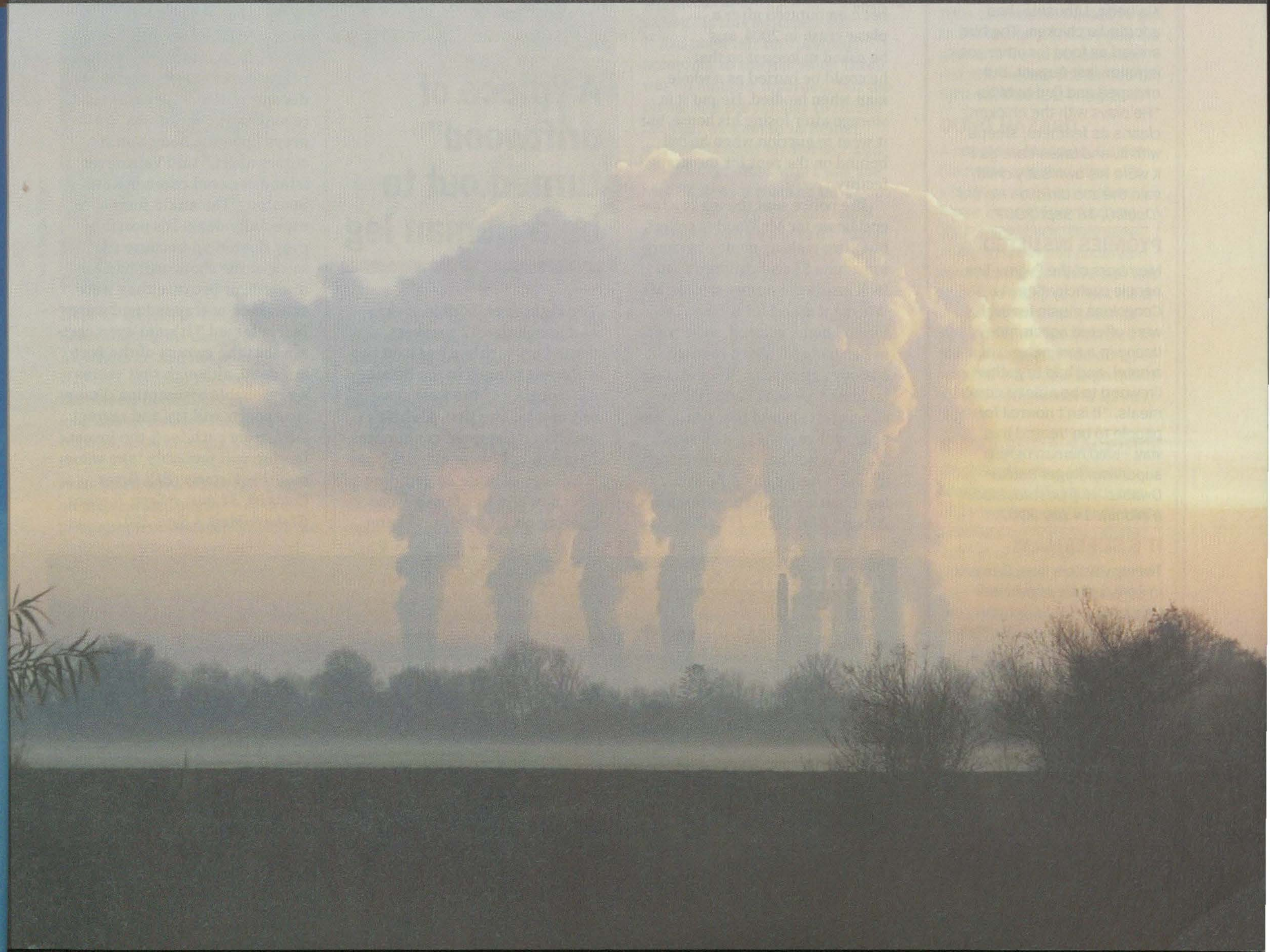
D.Mail, 3 April 2007.

CLOUD FIGURES

This page: The Grim Reaper or *Stratocumulus* with crepuscular rays: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, taken by Richard Unwin. / A dog barking or *Cumulus congestus*: Soldiers Point, Australia, taken by Terry Linsell.
Facing page: A Flying Saucer or *Altocumulus lenticularis*: Syria, taken by Gianandrea Sandri and Roberto Cavallini. / A pig with six legs: UK, taken by Ian Loxley.
Photos all taken from *A Pig with Six Legs and other clouds*, ed. Gavin Pretor-Pinney (Cloud Appreciation Society, 2007). www.cloudappreciationsociety.org.







SIDELINES...

ARK WASHED UP

An abandoned wooden fishing boat with more than 5,000 animals – including 31 pangolins, 44 leatherback turtles, 2,720 monitor lizards and 1,130 Brazilian turtles – was found near Qingzhou island in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong. Crushed inside crates, most were alive, although so dehydrated they were close to death. There were also 21 bear paws wrapped in newspaper. The animals were probably destined for the pharmacies and restaurant tables of southern China. *Sydney Morning Herald, 28 May 2007.*

CHICKEN REPRIEVED

Mitis, a Hamadryas baboon living in a private zoo in Klaipeda, Lithuania, has adopted a chicken. The bird arrived as food for other zoo inmates last August, but escaped and fled to Mitis. "He plays with the chicken, cleans its feathers, sleeps with it, and takes care as if it were his own baby child," said the zoo director. *Herald (Dublin), 18 Sept 2007.*

PYGMIES INSULTED

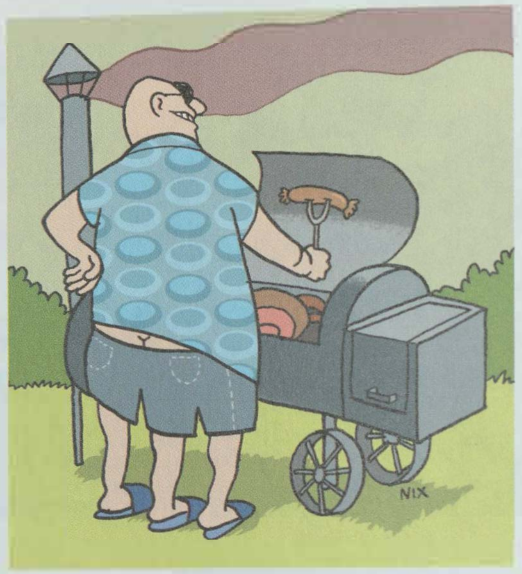
Members of the Pygmy Twa people participating in a Congolese music festival were offered accommodation in a zoo instead of a hotel, and had to gather firewood to be able to cook meals. "It isn't normal for people to be treated this way," said human rights supervisor Roger Bouka Owaoko. *Hufvudstadsbladet (Finland), 14 July 2007.*

IT'S SUPERMAN!

Twenty villagers from Gemeni in Romania are convinced they have seen Superman in his famous blue suit. "Reliable citizens saw him flying over their houses," said police officer Ion Anuta. Constantin Toader, 41, said: "He looked like Superman and was flying slowly at about 100 yards [91m] from the ground in a standing position." *Sunday Mail, 23 Sept 2007.*

Without a leg to stand on

Individual limbs are showing up in quite unexpected places



NIX

On 26 September, Shannon Whisnant from Maiden, North Carolina, bought a barbecue smoker at an auction of items left behind at a storage facility. Opening it up, he saw what he thought was a piece of driftwood wrapped in paper. However, he found it was a human leg, cut off two or three inches (5–8cm) above the knee. He took it to the police, who discovered it belonged to John Wood, who had fallen behind on payments at the storage facility. It had been amputated after a plane crash in 2004, and he asked to keep it so that he could be buried as a whole man when he died. He put it in storage after losing his house, but it went to auction when he fell behind on the rent for the storage facility.

The police sent the leg to a funeral home for Mr Wood to collect, but after making money by charging adults $3 and children $1 to look inside the empty smoker, Mr Whisnant asked for it back. The funeral home refused, so he tried to persuade Mr Wood to share custody and profits. "It's a strange incident," he said, "and Hallowe'en is just around the corner. The price will go up if I get the leg." Mr Wood was having none of it. "I think it's despicable," he said. A legal battle was in the offing. *[AP] 26 Sept; BBC News, 2 Oct 2007.*

A "piece of driftwood" turned out to be a human leg

Two right feet, both in socks and men's size 12 sneakers, turned up within a week on two different islands in the Strait of Georgia, off the west coast of Canada. The first, a white and blue "Campus" runner, was found by a 12-year-old girl from Washington State on Jedidiah Island, while her family were boating on 20 August. "There were five different shoes on the beach, and for some reason she picked up that one, untied the laces, turned the sock inside out and found the foot," said Bruce Jones, *de facto* caretaker of the 240ha (600-acre) island. On 26 August, a Vancouver couple walking on a beach trail on Gabriola Island found the second foot, inside a white and black Reebok trainer. It was 50m (164ft) from the shoreline, waterlogged, and probably dragged on shore by animals.

Both feet still had flesh intact, although they were in varying states of decomposition. "Remains tend to sink in the water, sea life preys upon the body, and it comes apart," said Vancouver Island regional coroner Rose Stanton. "The ankle joints are especially weak. It's possible they floated up because the soles of the shoes still had air in them, or because they were contained or trapped and were just released." It's not even certain that the owners of the feet are dead, although that seems a reasonable assumption. Forensic experts will try and extract DNA from each foot; the investigation will probably take some months. *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist, 31 Aug, 1 Sept; Toronto Globe & Mail, 1 Sept 2007.*

MORE GRISLY TALES

DRASTIC OFFERING

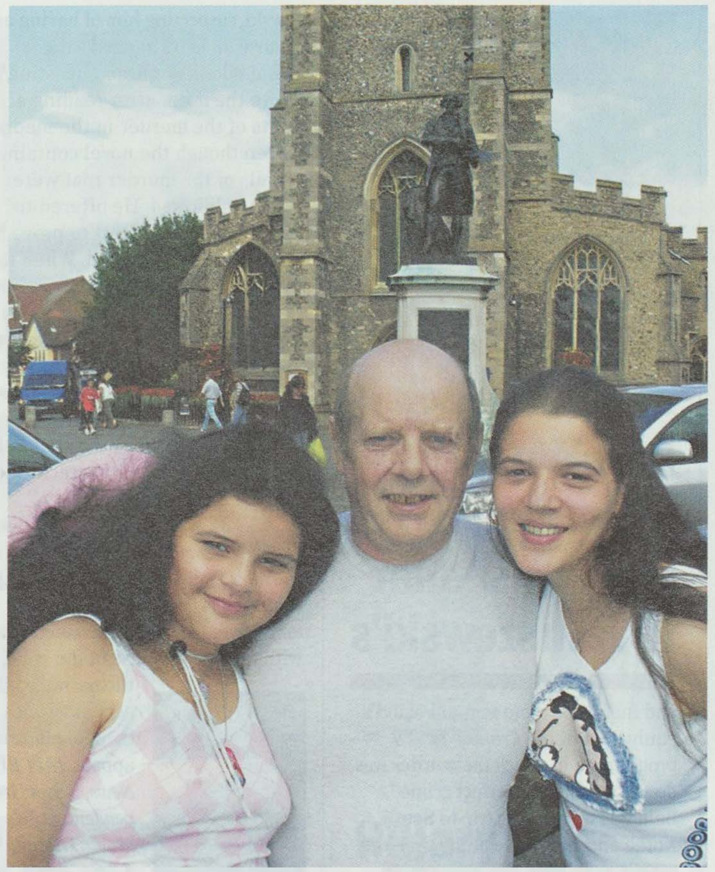
After worshipping at a temple to the Goddess Kali in Nepal on 31 July, a 23-year-old man chopped off his right hand with a kukhuri, a traditional curved Nepalese knife, as an offering to the Goddess. He was in a stable condition at a hospital in Biratnagar, 155 miles (250km) southeast of Kathmandu. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 31 July 2007.*

FISHERMAN'S FRIEND

In December 2006, trawlerman Barry Hunter, 58, of North Shields, North Tyneside, found a human skull fragment in his nets and handed it to police. DNA tests in July showed it belonged to his friend and fellow fisherman Brian Allison, 27. Brian and stepbrother Robert Temple, 34, vanished when their steel-hulled trawler *Jann Denise II* sank near the mouth of the River Tyne as the pair returned from a fishing trip in November 2004. *BBC News, 19 July; Ananova, 20 July; Adelaide Sunday Mail, 22 July 2007.*

Fancy seeing you here!

Long-lost daughter seen in background, plus odd phone call



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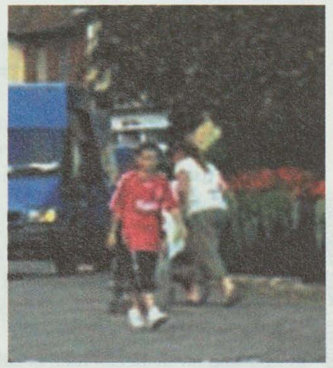


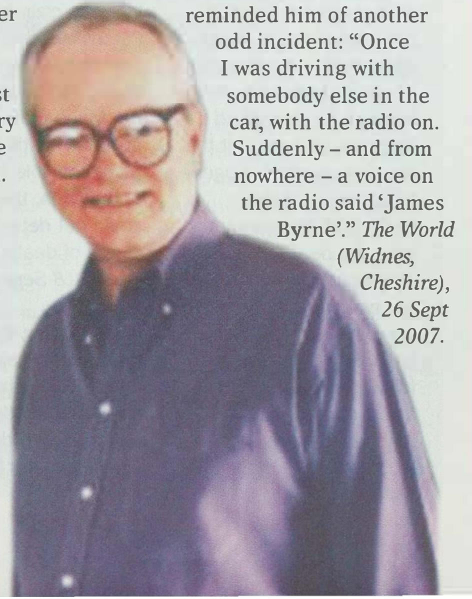
SHE'S BEHIND YOU!

Searching for his daughter Lisa, 31, whom he had not seen for 10 years, Michael Dick scoured the streets of Sudbury in Suffolk and looked through the electoral register. After drawing a blank, he went to the weekly *Suffolk Free Press* newspaper, which ran a story on the search. The paper took a photograph of Michael, 58, and the daughters from his second marriage – Samantha, 22, and 10-year-old Shannon – in the town centre (above, detail top right). Not long after the paper hit the streets, Lisa discovered her father was trying to find her when friends mentioned the story. Looking at the photograph, she realised she and her mother were in the background, walking past the church. "Mum and I had been standing in the exact place where the picture was taken about a minute earlier," she said. "It is incredible."

She got in touch with her father through the paper, and Mr Dick, a carpenter from Bow in east London, set off that evening to meet her and her children Ross (13), Sam (11) and Courtney (eight). Lisa, Mr Dick's daughter from his first marriage, moved to Sudbury as a baby with her mother after her parents split up. She now lives in Colchester, Essex, and just happened to be in Sudbury visiting her mother on the day the picture was taken. *Suffolk Free Press, 9 Aug; Metro, 10 Aug 2007.*

MESSAGE FROM THE GRAVE?

James Byrne, 53, of Widnes in Cheshire (right), is a well-known medium who once gave demonstrations at the London Palladium, and has published a book called *The Psychic World of James Byrne*. When he returned from holiday in August, he discovered a message on his answerphone – a man saying "Is this switched on?" It had been left on 7 August, according to the machine. There was no number recorded, but the phone had the facility to return the call. "A woman in Bolton answered," said Mr Byrne, "and when I explained who I was she said I'd done a reading for her 14 years earlier. She said she'd not made the phone call." After hearing the recording, she said it was the voice of her partner, who had died in June. She contacted British Telecom to check her phone records, and they said that no call had been made to Mr Byrne's number on 7 August. "We can't explain it," he said. "I'm not saying it's a ghost or an example of EVP [electronic voice phenomenon] – but it is very strange." It reminded him of another odd incident: "Once I was driving with somebody else in the car, with the radio on. Suddenly – and from nowhere – a voice on the radio said 'James Byrne'." *The World (Widnes, Cheshire), 26 Sept 2007.*



SIDELINES...

LIZARD WITHIN LIZARD

Finley Collins, seven, thought her 12in (30cm) bearded dragon lizard was giving birth when she noticed a protrusion near its tail. But Florida vet John Rossi pulled out a 7in (18cm) toy rubber lizard, which had passed through its intestinal tract. *Evening Times, 24 Sept 2007.*

BROTHERLY LOVE

A man embarrassed about the size of his penis faced jail after telling his girlfriend he wanted to make love in the dark – and then getting his brother to take his place. Manfred Shuh, 26, persuaded his brother Walter, 28, with whom he shared a house in Berlin, to wait outside the room while he got her to turn the light off, then claimed he wanted to go to the lavatory. The 24-year-old girlfriend found out after two months – when she turned the light on. *Metro, 24 Aug 2007.*

DUNG HAZARD

A couple in Modesto, California, were arrested after officials discovered a miniature horse living in their kitchen and dining room. They were charged with child endangerment as the woman's son was forced to sleep in a tent inside his bedroom to protect himself from the flies attracted by the mounds of horse dung, of which there was a large quantity. *Irish Independent, 21 July 2007.*

SUCCESSFUL SACRIFICE

On 2 September, following technical problems with one of its two Boeing 757s, Nepal Airlines sacrificed two goats in front of the plane at Kathmandu airport. The offering was made to Akash Bhairab, the Hindu god of sky protection, whose symbol is seen on the company's planes. "The snag in the plane has now been fixed and the aircraft has resumed its flights," said a senior airline official, without explaining what the problem had been; but local media blamed an electrical fault. *[R] BBC News, 4 Sept 2007.*

SIDELINES...

ALL-ROUNDER

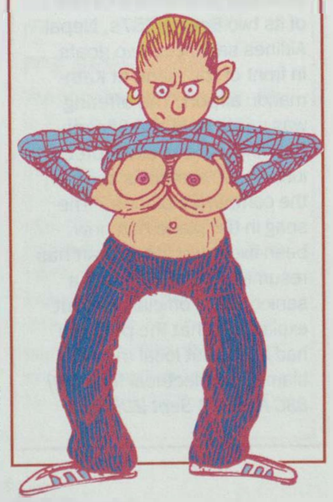
Thai police arrested Ekkarat Dapngern, 23, at his hideaway in Nakorn Sri Thammarat province south of Bangkok on 28 August. He was accused of serial rape of women, cows, and banana trees. Asked why he assaulted cows, he said: "Anyone who has had sex with a cow knows there is nothing odd about it at all." *The Australian, 29 Aug 2007.*

POOR MEMORY REWARDED

Derek Ladner, 59, from Redruth, Cornwall, bought a lottery ticket, forgetting he already had one. He used the same numbers for both. This meant that, when the numbers came up on Friday, 13 July, he doubled his share of the £2.4million jackpot. He and his wife Dawn, 60, were presented with a cheque for £958,284. It was the first time anyone has won the jackpot twice in the same draw. *BBC News, 1 Aug 2007.*

BREAST ATTACK

A woman squirted her breast milk at a store detective when he tried to stop her pinching goods in Leicester. She exposed her breasts and fired away after being confronted in a Co-op store. The attack is thought to be the latest in a trend among shoplifters to get their DNA on security officers so that they can accuse them of sexual assault if caught. *Metro, 21 Sept 2007.*



MARTIN ROSS

Polish novelist in the dock

Writing about your own crime might be a bit of a give away

On 10 December 2000, the body of Dariusz Janiszewski, the young, well-liked owner of a small advertising agency, was seen by fishermen on the banks of the River Oder in the town of Wroclaw, close to the German border in south-west Poland. He had been stripped to shirt and underpants, tortured and starved; his limbs had been distended, his hands bound and tied to a noose around his neck.

For years, police could find no motive and no suspect – then in 2005 Chief Inspector Jacek Wroblewski had an anonymous call, suggesting he read *Amok*, a tale of how a group of intellectuals delve into sex, drugs and torture, published in 2003. The book was the first novel by philosophy graduate Krystian Bala, and carried a description of a murder with strong similarities to Janiszewski's. Police then discovered that Bala had called the victim on the day he disappeared and had sold a mobile phone, the same model as the victim's missing one, on an Internet auction website four days after the body was found.

As if he were taunting the authorities to arrest him, Bala had sent a copy of *Amok* to the Attorney General in Warsaw. Anonymous emails from Internet cafes in South Korea and Indonesia were sent to Poland's equivalent of the *Crimewatch* TV programme in which the murder was described as "the perfect crime". Bala was on a diving trip to South Korea and Indonesia at the time the emails were sent. The prosecution said the author was jealous of Janiszewski, suspecting him of having an affair with his estranged wife.

REX FEATURES / PAWEL SKORZEWSKI

Bala's novel described a murder similar to Janiszewski's

Bala denied murder, insisting he wrote the novel after reading accounts of the murder in the media – even though the novel contained details of the murder that were never publicised. He offered to take a lie-detector test to prove his innocence – and passed. When the transcripts were read out in court, the judge was struck by the very long pauses taken by Bala before answering, a technique that may allow a suspect to mask the physical signs of lying. "My view," Wroblewski told the court, "is that Bala was using the breathing techniques that he had learnt as a diver."

Bala, 34, was found guilty and sentenced to 25 years in jail, although the court said there was not enough evidence to prove he had acted alone. Here, real life parted company with fiction – because in the book, the narrator-killer gets away with it. Bala plans to appeal. *[AP] BBC News, 5 Sept; Independent, D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 6 Sept; Times, 9 Sept 2007.*

MURDER, THEY WROTE...

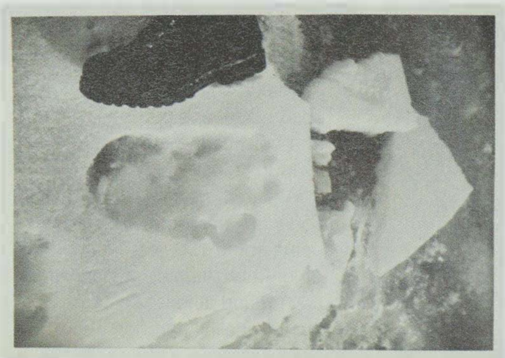
A Russian émigré is being hunted in New York after two of his girlfriends died in almost identical circumstances to those described in a collection of short stories he wrote in which he described attempts to carry out the "perfect murder". Eugene Perchikov collected £500,000 life insurance after the death of a mistress in Brooklyn in 2002, but two other insurance companies refused to pay a similar amount following the death of the second woman in Manhattan two years later. Relatives of Larysa Vasserman, 48, and Tatiana Korkhova, 54, both Russian immigrants, filed lawsuits claiming that Perchikov killed them. The suits were dismissed in mid-September, but the Manhattan district attorney is still investigating possible fraud. In both cases, the coroner could not determine the cause of death. *D.Telegraph, 18 Sept 2007.*

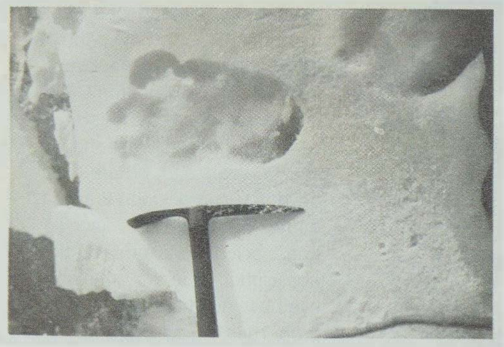
Investigating the disappearance of Alejandra Galeana, 30, a pharmacy clerk and single mother, police raided the Mexico City flat of her boyfriend, Jose Luis Calva, 40, on 8 October. Calva tried to escape, but was struck by a car and hospitalised. Galeana's torso was found in a cupboard, one of her legs and flesh from an arm in the fridge and arm bones in a cereal carton. Calva told police he had boiled some of her flesh but had not eaten it. Tests were to be carried out on fried meat found in a pan to see if it was human. Police also found the draft of a novel entitled *Cannibalistic Instincts*. Calva said he was a writer and a fan of Anthony Hopkins (Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*). Calva is being investigated in two earlier Mexico City mutilation killings: an unidentified prostitute last April and an ex-girlfriend, Veronica Martinez – also a single mother and pharmacy worker – whose dismembered body was found in 2004. *[AP] 11 Oct 2007*.

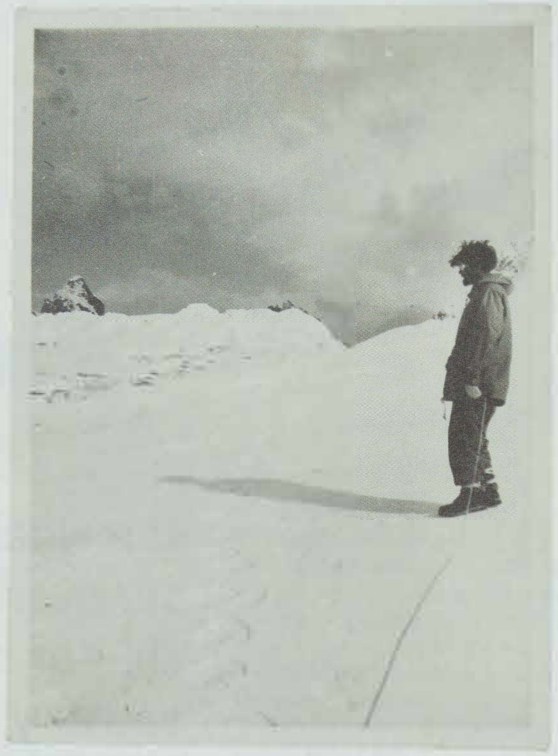
Dutchman Richard Klinkhammer was convicted for fictionalising the real-life 1991 murder of his wife in a thriller called *On Wednesday, It's Mincemeat*, published in 2000. See **FT135:24**.

Yeti print photos for sale

Mountaineer claimed best evidence for Abominable Snowman







CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD / ERIC EARLE SHIPTON

Four photographs supposedly showing footprints of the 'Abominable Snowman' in the Himalayan snow sold for £3,500 at Christie's auction house in London on 26 September. They were taken by British mountaineer Eric Shipton in 1951, during a reconnaissance expedition prior to the British attempt on Everest beginning the following year.

The set of unmounted black-and-white photos had an asking price of £1,800. Part of a themed collection of lots from mountaineers, explorers and geographers, they were quaintly described only as "the property of a lady" and their provenance given as "A gift from Tom Bourdillon to Michael John Davies in the 1950s, and thence by descent to the present owner". Nothing was said in the catalogue about whether these were original prints or how many others might be in circulation, nor of the whereabouts of the negatives. Their value chiefly derives from a descriptive handwritten message on the reverse by Bourdillon, a member of the expedition who joined them later.

Hillary's bearers were convinced that the yeti hair was genuine

The most famous photograph shows an ice axe next to a footprint for comparison (above left). In another (top left), Shipton's colleague Michael Ward places his climbing boot – "a British 8 1/2, about 12 to 13 inches [30–33cm] long" – beside another imprint. A third shows Michael Ward gazing at the line of footprints, which stretched for more than a mile (1.6km) near the Menlung glacier (above right). (It has been claimed that the single footprint is quite different from the long track. According to Sir Edmund Hillary: "Eric tended to rather dodge giving too much of a reply" when asked about the discrepancy. Ward, however, insisted the print was not faked and was part of the track. See **FT54:18–20**.)

In 1952, during preparation for the following year's assault on Everest, Hillary's bearers found what they claimed was yeti hair on a rock near the Khumbu glacier. "I couldn't help being impressed by their conviction," he later wrote in his account, *High Adventure* (1955). Hillary's next expedition, in 1960, kept a specific watch for the yeti with disappointing results. However, in 1970, British mountaineer Don Whillans, a fervent believer, claimed he spotted a yeti on the slopes of Annapurna. *D.Telegraph, 22 Sept; Metro, 27 Sept 2007.*

For Tony Woolridge's photographs of an alleged yeti and its footprints, see **FT48:38–43**.

SIDELINES...

BULGAR HOOFED

Georghe Mikhailov, 36, was driving towards Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria when a runaway horse appeared and tried to jump over his car. One of its front legs broke through the windscreen and crushed the driver's genitals. The horse had to be put down and Mikhailov taken to hospital in severe pain. *(Dublin) Metro, 26 July 2007*.

CADGING COFFEE

A woman in Snappertuna, southern Finland, was on a coffee break when a raven joined her. "It landed on the table and took the spoon from my cup," she said. "Then it put the spoon down, stuck its beak into the cup and began gulping down coffee." The raven stayed the whole afternoon and was treated to cheese and cat food. Neighbours knew of the bird, which had a habit of trying (unsuccessfully) to steal mobile phones. *Västra Nyland (Finland), 31 July 2007*.

PUZZLING AD

The following advertisement appeared in a Sheffield newspaper in 1999: "Professional man, 45, head on a stick, seeks similar woman". The ad had been transcribed from a phone call. We can only hope that hedonistic professional women got the message. *New Scientist, 11 Aug 2007.*

LONELY HEARTS

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

BURIED TOOTH

Ben Czislowski, 24, received a nasty cut above his eye during a clash of heads while playing rugby for the Wynnum Manly Seagulls in Brisbane, Australia, on 1 April. Rival Matt Austin lost several teeth. Czislowski's wound was stitched up, but he felt lethargic and had an eye infection and shooting pains in the head. After 15 weeks, the injury was checked by a doctor, who found one of Austin's teeth embedded just above his eye. *Adelaide Advertiser, D.Mail, 18 July 2007.*

SECOND LUCKY STRIKE

Don Frick, 68, was struck by lightning on 27 July at a festival in Hamlin, Pennsylvania. As a storm closed in, he and six others sought refuge in a shed shortly before lightning struck the ground nearby, sending a shock through him and the others. He escaped with a burned zip and a hole in the back of his jeans. On 27 July 1980 (*exactly* 27 years earlier) he had been driving a tractor-trailer when the antenna was struck by lightning, leaving his left side injured for weeks. *[AP] 29 July; Guardian, 30 July 2007.*

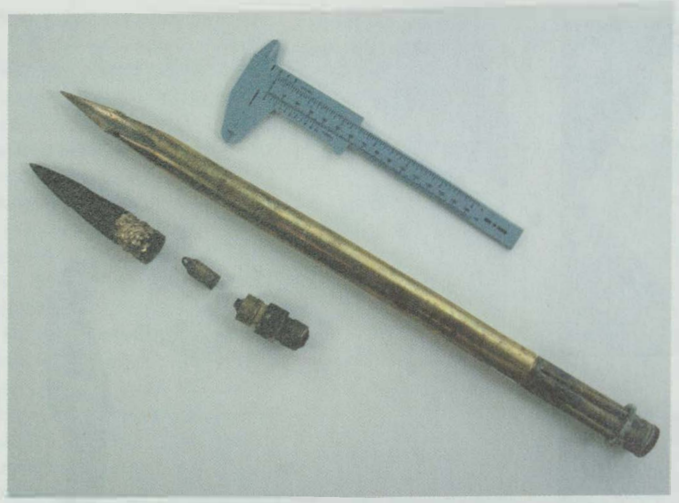
PAIN IN THE NECK

A man with no arms caught rabies after being bitten by a weasel that ran up his trousers and latched on to his neck. Aurel Constantinescu, 48, had to run for 15 minutes back to his home in Suceava, eastern Romania, where his wife pulled the animal off and killed it. *D.Record, 14 Sept 2007.*

MARTIN ROSS

Stuck with an old harpoon

Antique spear shows that whale may be 115–130 years old



COURTESY OF THE NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

A whale caught by Inupiat Eskimos off the Alaskan coast last May had a weapon embedded in its neck (above), evidence that it had survived a similar hunt more than a century ago. The hunting party caught the 50-ton bowhead (or Greenland) whale from an *umiaq*, a large vessel made from sealskin. They were butchering it with a chainsaw when they found a 3.5in (9cm) or 5in (12.7cm) arrow-shaped fragment embedded deep under its blubber. It had notches on the side, indicating it came from an Inupiat village. As traditional whale hunters never took calves, the find enabled researchers to estimate the age of the whale as between 115 and 130 years old. The oldest any whale can live is thought to be about 200 years, but the age calculation is difficult as it involves measuring amino acids in the eye lenses.

"No other finding has been this precise," said John Bockstoce, an adjunct curator of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. He said the bomb lance fragment, which was lodged in a bone between the neck and shoulder blade, was likely to have been made in New Bedford, Massachusetts, centre of the 19th-century US whaling industry. It was probably shot from a heavy shoulder gun between 1880 and 1890. The device was fitted with explosives and a time-delay fuse so it would explode after entering the body. It was designed to kill immediately.

Mr Bockstoce said the device had exploded but probably only injured the whale. "It hit him in a non-lethal place," he said. "He couldn't have been that bothered if he lived for another 100 years." The 49ft (15m) whale was killed when he was shot with a similar projectile. The Inupiat Eskimos are a distinct ethnic grouping that encompasses the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Siberia. They have hunted bowhead whales for at least 2,500 years and take about 60 bowheads a year from the Bering Sea under special licence from the International Whaling Commission, even though bowheads are an endangered species – there are thought to be about 8,000 to 12,000 left. The weapon fragment will be displayed at the Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska. *[AP] 13 June; Independent, D.Mail, 14 June 2007.*

> **The whale had survived a similar hunt a century ago**

ANCIENT BOWHEADS

A small triangular ivory spear point was found in the blubber of a bowhead whale harpooned by Inupiat Inuit hunters in Alaska in the spring of 1981, and was later identified as being some 190 years old. Since then, Inupiat whalers have found at least six traditional whaling harpoon heads, made of stone and ivory, in the blubber of whales they were butchering. Comparisons with harpoons collected by anthropologists at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC date the points to at least 130 years, and possibly as long as 200 years ago, before the advent of contact with Europeans. Following these discoveries, scientists examining the near-spherical lens of the whale eye have used the chemical properties of aspartic acid – a component of protein – to suggest such longevity might even be underestimated. Craig George, lead researcher with Alaska's North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management, has pointed out that his studies of whale carcasses have shown them to be almost completely free of illness. Admittedly, these creatures inhabit an area of only sparse human population, so such specimens are not common.

The whales that survived those Inuit attacks were probably already mature when first struck. More modern harpoon heads have been found in other whales, including one pulled from whale blubber in 1890 that was traced to a specific whaling boat, the *Montezuma*, which made its last cruise 36 years before that.

Elephants don't live much past 60, while female orcas are thought to be capable of reaching the age of 90. *Equinox, Sept 2000.*

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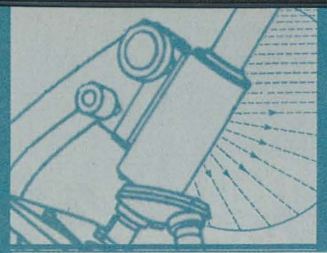


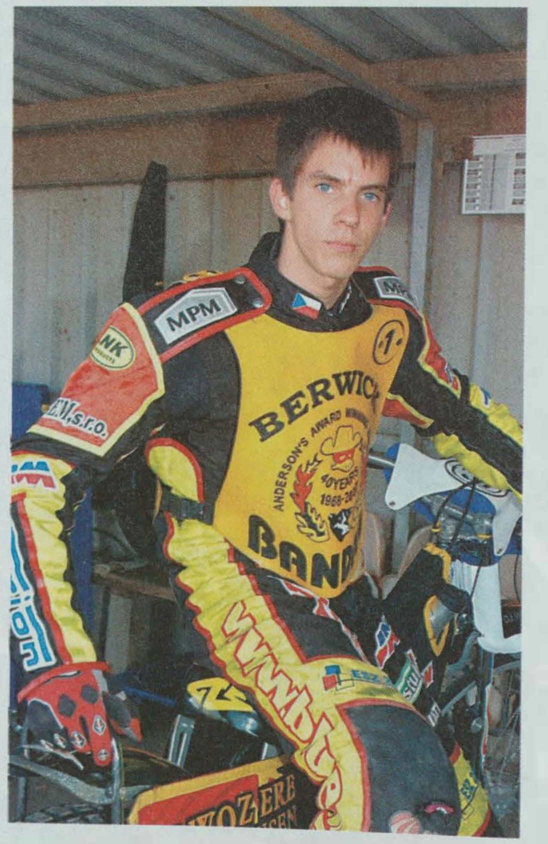
MATT PATTINSON

MEDICAL BAG

NEWSPEAK...

PAUL SIEVEKING examines cases where illness or injury causes a change in accent or even linguistic skills.

ROSS PARRY AGENCY



NORTH NEWS & PICTURES

ABOVE: William McCartney-Moore gained a posh accent after surgery.
LEFT: Czech speedway rider Matej Kus found his English – and his accent – improved after a motorcycle accident.

In March 2006, nine-year-old William McCartney-Moore from York fell seriously ill with a rare strain of viral meningitis and had an operation to remove the fluid from a subdural empyæma (an abscess on the brain). "All the doctors and surgeons thought he was going to die – nobody thought he was going to come out of surgery," said his mother, Ruth McCartney-Moore, 45, a music teacher. "Before he went in I cut off a lock of his hair to keep." Eighteen months later, William has made a near-total recovery, but to begin with he lost his ability to read and write and his memory was also affected. However, he was able to play the piano and trumpet much better than before.

He also lost his northern twang and acquired the elongated vowels of received pronunciation (RP). The family first noticed the change in his accent after he left hospital in April. "We went on a family holiday in Northumberland," said his mother, Ruth McCartney-Moore. "He was playing on the beach and he said, 'Look, I've made a sandcastle', but really stretched his vowels, which made him sound really posh... He had no idea why we were staring at him – he just thought he was speaking normally."

The transformation has the hallmarks of a rare condition called foreign accent syndrome (FAS), when a brain injury can cause a person to end up speaking very differently. In many cases the muscle groups in the lips, tongue and vocal cords lose coordination and speech changes in terms of timing, intonation or even where the person places their tongue. For other examples of FAS, see **FT58:26, 76:14, 102:15, 135:21, 180:5.** ***D.Telegraph, D.Mail, Guardian, 18 Sept 2007.***

Matej Kus, 18, was involved in a speedway accident in Glasgow on 9 September. He was knocked out when he flew over the handlebars and a rival inadvertantly drove over his head, splitting his helmet. He lay unconscious on the track for 45 minutes. The Czech teenager had flown into Britain only the day before. He knew only the most basic English phrases, but when he regained consciousness he conversed fluently in English with paramedics, even speaking in an English accent. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing," said Peter Waite, the promoter for Kus's team, the Berwick Bandits. "He had changed from being someone I could hardly understand to someone who sounded like a BBC announcer. Whatever happened in the crash must have rearranged things in his head... Matej didn't have a clue who or where he was when he came round. He didn't even know he was Czech."

He injured ligaments in his left knee and was told to take it easy for a month. His newfound language skills didn't last. After flying home to Plzen in the Czech Republic to recover, he said – through an interpreter – that he remembered nothing of the accident or of the following two days. "I hope I can pick English up over the winter for the start of next season so that I'll be able to speak it without someone having to hit me over the head first," he said (in Czech). Psychic researchers have called the ability to speak a language without having learned it xenoglossia. There are not many recorded cases. *D.Mail, D.Express, Metro, 14 Sept 2007.*

Holiday rep Tricia Whitehead was left fighting for life after her car plunged 100ft (30m) over a cliff in Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands in July 2004. Although she didn't know Spanish before the accident, when she awoke from a coma in Dewsbury Hospital, West Yorkshire, two months later, she started shouting "Saquene de aqui" (Get me out of here) and "Yo soy apestoso" (I'm smelly) to confused nurses. Her family believe she picked up the phrases during the two weeks she spent unconscious in Gran Canaria as staff spoke to her. Doctors there saved her life after removing a bone in her forehead to relieve swelling. She was then flown back to Britain, still in a coma. Tricia, 26, couldn't understand what was going on around her and at the time of the report still couldn't recall her time in Gran Canaria or the crash – and was astonished to learn she had been babbling in Spanish. *Irish Daily Mirror, 14 May 2007.*

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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reports on some uncanny cats hanging around British hostelries and some daunting dogs menacing tribal groups in South America.

TOM BIRD

FELINE PHANTOMS...

Drinkers at the tiny Nutshell pub (above) in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, know better than to show disrespect towards a mummified cat hanging above them from the ceiling (facing page). Dating from around 1820, the Nutshell moves in and out of its claimed status as the "smallest pub in the country", but can certainly claim the title of the "smallest haunted pub" with just enough room for the suspended feline to be swung in. However, regulars would be loath to do so, for the cat is treated with guarded affection amid belief that it is bad luck to remove or even touch it. Locals still recall that in September 1982 it was stolen by pranksters and was feared to be permanently lost. Then, some six weeks later, it was returned anonymously to the pub, amid rumours that the thieves had suffered bad luck. Another story told in 2003 concerned airmen from RAF Honington removing the cat as a joke and suffering a car accident on their way back to base.

Cat burials protected against magic and pestilence

The Nutshell cat is perhaps 200 years older than the building itself, originally having been found in the wall of another pub that once stood in St John's Street. Such feline burials seem to have been made as foundation sacrifices during the construction of buildings and considered protection against magic or pestilence – the symbolic presence of a cat being imagined as a deterrent against infestation by vermin. The Nutshell cat is one of the few examples on display in a pub or hotel. A pair of cats allegedly once owned by witch Hannah Clarke may be seen at the Elizabethan Stag Inn in Hastings, Sussex (see *Maypoles, Martyrs & Mayhem*, 1994, by Quentin Cooper and Paul Sullivan).

The Mill Hotel at Sudbury, Suffolk, has another example, visible in a glass-topped grave in the entrance to the building. Following fires and accidents after its discovery in 1971, it was re-interred in 1975 and was blamed for further misfortunes when moved again in 1999 (see *Haunted Britain and Ireland*, 2004, by Richard Jones). Strange tappings and footsteps were also reported after the discovery of mummified cats and kittens inside the walls of old cottages at Fakenham Magna in Suffolk in 1972. Linked with local witchcraft, one is now displayed at Moyses Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds and may have been an inspiration for one of the stories in the late Nigel Kneale's *Beasts* collection in 1976. *Pers. comm. Mrs J Lomax, formerly of Ingham, 15 Aug 2003; Bury Free Press, 18 Aug 1972. For more on mummified cat finds, see* ***FT52:6–7, 75:13, 77:7***.

The Nutshell Pub also claims an appropriately pint-sized apparition, a little boy seen upstairs in October 1975. A Mr Sid Frisby, a Nutshell regular, went to the top floor to prepare for a game of dominoes, when he saw the phantom of a small boy sitting alone in the room, the form vanishing before his eyes. Brian Wimshurst, the then landlord and his wife, Karin, believed him, having felt "cold shivers" in the upper room themselves. The haunting is said to originate from the spirit of a child who died on the premises in mysterious circumstances. There have been reports of poltergeist disturbances in recent years. In May 2003, staff reported the unexplained shattering of glasses. Various amateur ghost-hunting groups have investigated the pub and, in 2004, one group suffered an odd draining of batteries in equipment they brought inside with the hope of recording activity; more recently, there have been smells of lavender in the pub. *Pers. comms: Nutshell Pub staff, Oct 2006 and Sept 2007; Stars & Stripes, Oct 2006; East Anglian Daily Times, 20 Oct 1975.*

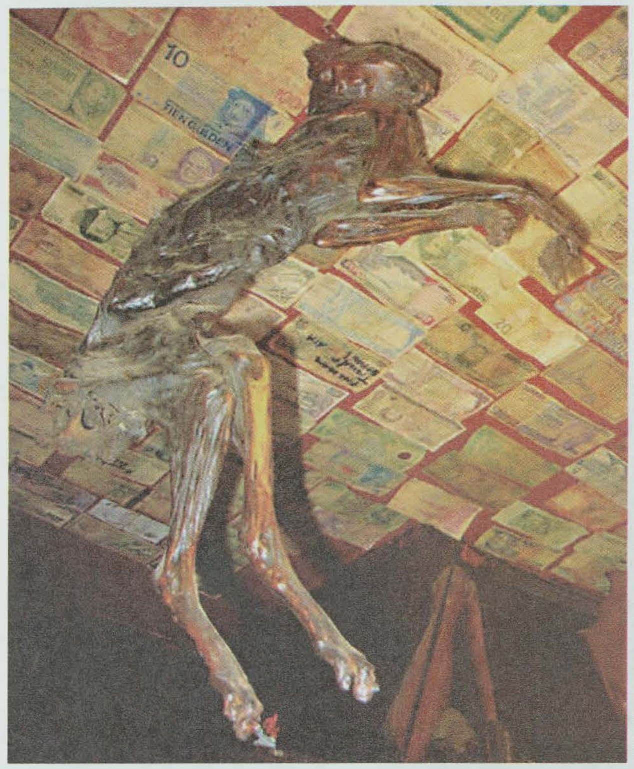
Ghostly domestic cats are relatively rare (certainly compared with reports of ABCs) and form a small slice of the two to five per cent of apparitions that appear as animals. In the early 1920s, a dwelling inside Edinburgh Castle occupied by a Colonel and Mrs Street was reportedly haunted by one or more phantom cats, according to a letter dating from 1926 and preserved by the Society for Psychical Research, after the Streets had moved out (File H160, SPR).

A ghostly cat was reputed to haunt the site of Borley Rectory (**FT229:31**) from 1939 onwards, with ghost book writer James Wentworth Day (1899–1983) taking ghost-hunting literally by trying to shoot it in the autumn of 1939 (see James Wentworth Day's account in *Here are Ghosts and Witches*, 1954). The ghost was doubtless an occupant of the cat's cemetery that lay in the grounds, all pets of a former rector, Rev Harry Bull (1863–1927), a great cat lover. The landlord of the Old Nag's Head at Holme Hale, Norfolk, reported a phantom cat jumping on beds at night in 1968 (*Lynn News & Advertiser*, 5 Jan 1968); and the same year a sinister black cat with red-flecked amber eyes was seen at Killakee Art Centre near Dublin (*Haunted Ireland*, 1977, by John J Dunne).

In 1971, a family in Bastion Street, Nottingham, sought police assistance after four nights without sleep on account of a ghostly cat (See *Daily Mail*, 21 Oct 1972). A folkloric feline spectre at Congleton, Cheshire, has been linked with Lewis Carroll's grinning Cheshire Cat, while another at the church at St James Garlickhythe in London is supposed to be the one that belonged to Dick Whittington (see *The Lore of the Land*, 2006, by Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson; *Haunted London*, 1973, by Peter Underwood).

...AND HAUNTING HOUNDS

Meanwhile, in South America, a large hound the size of a wolf is menacing an indigenous settlement occupied by members of the Wayuu tribe in the province of Guijera, in the northeast tip of Colombia. The phantom is black in colour and has been seen on tracks and roads surrounding a tribal rancheria or traditional-style village, 12km (7.5 miles) north of the coastal town of Rioacha. Although the creature resembles a hound, its howls and cries sound more like a cat than a dog. The creature is considered by the Wayuu to be spectral rather than physical in nature.



TOM BIRD

The haunted area was originally settled by a single Wayuu family about a century ago and has since expanded to become the territory of a number of interlinked clans. The tribe has succeeded in preserving many of its traditions with its cultural values and practices being given formal recognition in Colombian law. The Wayuu are familiar with human apparitions, usually those of deceased persons who have lived bad lives. Not everyone can see such ghosts, but they frequently appear floating above the ground, perhaps representing separation from the material world.

Aldina Pimienta Asphana, a Wayuu guide whose family founded the settlement, has seen several ghosts herself, including one of a tall dark man who appeared on a beach, standing just in the waves at the shoreline. Although there were around 40 tourists present, only she and another Wayuu woman were able to sense it. Like many apparitions worldwide, ghosts in Wayuu culture prefer the hours of darkness and appear white and luminous after death, contrasting with the dark complexion of living tribe members.

Colombia has traditions of *el perro negro* or black dog much further inland, in the province of Antioquia, but nothing like the phantom hound has been encountered in areas settled by the Wayuu before. Ms Asphana has not yet seen the phantom dog herself, but earlier this year a male relative cycling on the main highway had a frightening nocturnal encounter. The ghost dog appeared in the road and he found his bicycle seemingly immobile. He was unable to pedal until the form vanished. The detail is reminiscent of stories of the alleged effects on motor vehicles of encounters with UFOs and occasionally apparitions.

Regarding the significance of the ghostly dog, the Wayuu female elders of the local tribe believe that it represents an apparition generated by the land itself. Problems have arisen with outsiders trespassing on Wayuu lands and tourists showing disrespect for customs by outstaying their welcome at the rancheria and drinking late into the night; the Earth itself is showing its displeasure at human folly. *Pers. comm. from Aldina Asphana, 1 Sept 2007; "Compendio General de Folklore Colombiano" by Guillermo Abadia Morales (1983); "Mitos de Antioquia" (1950) by Arturo Escobar Uribe.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

93. DOING IT DOGGY-FASHION

"A seeker of Truth. He will never find it. But the dimmest of possibilities. He may himself become Truth" – Fort, *Books*, p14.

Cynics (etymologically, 'Dog-matists') were pre-Beatniks and -Hippies. Though Antisthenes was the nominal founder, his pupil Diogenes became the brand name, modernly perpetuated by (e.g.) Rabelais, Chekhov, Seamus Heaney, and the Diogenes Club to which Sherlock Holmes's brother Mycroft belonged. An early monetarist, our man fled his native Sinope when accused of adulterating the local coinage (he later proposed using dice as currency – a craps idea?) to Athens where (later in Corinth) as everyone knows he lived in a tub, thus prefiguring Cardboard City. Actually (pauses to don pedant's cap), it was a wine-cask.

Talk about '*Epater la bourgeoisie*'! Diogenes devoted his long (412 or 399–323 BC) life to startling all classes – a tabloid editor's dream: our main source, Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, bk6 paras217–258, abounds in screaming headlines of his sayings and doings. People variously gaped, muttered, and applauded when he pointed his middle finger (tantamount to calling them 'Queers') at them, pissed at those who mocked him (the proto-hotlegger), and defecated in the theatre – you'd not want to sit next him: the play might stink, but…

His topical one-liners now fall flat. One exception is his riposte to Alexander the Great who offered him any favour: "Get out of my light" – ancestor of our Get Out of My Face.

Ancient biographers loved coincidences, hence some moderns disbelieve their claim that Diogenes and Alexander died on the same day. But truth is ever stranger than fiction, as *FT* demonstrates.

When he was observed promenading through the Athenian Agora with a lantern in broad daylight, people predictably asked what on Earth he was up to – "Looking for an honest man". Plato described Diogenes as "Socrates gone mad". I'd like to Tardis him to Wall Street or The City.

Diogenes was history's first famous wanker-flasher, publicly tossing off to an accompanying "If only I could satisfy hunger by thus rubbing my belly," a wish doubtless exacerbated by his diet of raw meat and lupins (noisily crunched at others' lectures – I never let on about this to my own students). Some attributed his death to eating raw octopus. Others said suicide by holding his breath – his disciple Metrocles followed suit.

Despite his greeting some swinging female corpses with "If only olive trees bore such fruit" (Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit* the obvious corrective here), Diogenes had one woman acolyte, Hipparchia, who claimed her right to study philosophy over weaving (think Hillary Clinton on baking cookies). Less attractive was the satirist Menippus who combined ostentatious Cynicism with great wealth, the first 'champagne socialist' – Greece's John Mortimer.

Modernly dubbed 'The Philosophy of the Proletariat', Cynicism had a long ancient run. Lucian's *Life of Peregrinus* commemorates a deutero-Diogenes who suffered the classic adulterer's penalty of a radish stuffed up his arse, buggered a boy then bought off the outraged parents, strangled his sexagenarian father ("You have lived long enough"), sponged off the early Christian community, some of whose books he forged, crowning this career by burning himself alive at the Olympic Games in AD 165 – such auto-arson would enliven our drear modern ones.

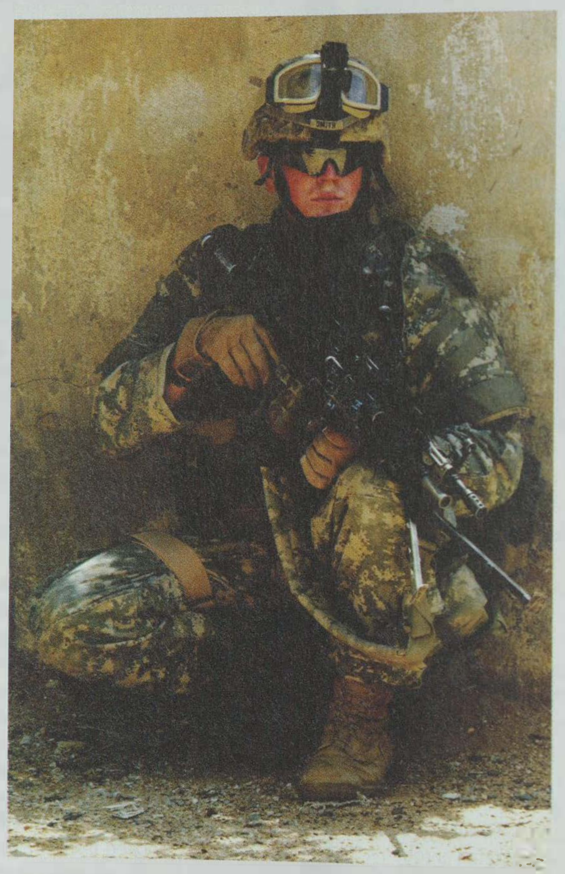
It also seeped into Christianity, although Paul Rose Eddy's 'Jesus as Cynic' (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 115.3, 1996, 449–69) overeggs that philosophical pudding – Christ the wanker?! Symeon 'The Holy Fool' (6th century) is a better candidate, said by his biographer Leontius to have arrived at Emesa (Syria) dragging a dead dog (Drop the Dead Donkey?), then parading his public nudity, defecating, farting, lupins and raw meat diet – stunts recently deplored (*City of God*, bk14 ch17) by Augustine.

"Genet prefers his own caresses, since the enjoyment received coincides with the enjoyment given" – Sartre.

"He has all the qualities of a dog, except loyalty" – Sam Houston on Thomas Jefferson Green.

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF **LOBSTER**, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER



WWW.DEFENSELINK.MIL

A clear picture has now emerged of how the Anglo-American forces got into the mire in Iraq: there was no plan for the day after the invasion. US soldiers stood and watched the looting of Baghdad because they literally had no orders. Detailed plans had been drawn up by the US State Department – but two months before the invasion, control was given to the Pentagon, and they scrapped the occupation plans. Those around Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld – the people running the show – had been persuaded that they didn't need a plan; that once the Americans had removed the Baathist regime from office, a new civil society would spontaneously appear. They wanted to believe this because it meant the occupation would be short, cheap and popular with the American voter.

The American military knew this wouldn't work, but failed to persuade the politicians and were unwilling to risk their careers by public dissent. British politicians, diplomats and soldiers knew this wouldn't work, but were ignored by the Americans and were unwilling to voice their doubts for fear of the damage to the AngloAmerican 'special relationship'. The CIA and the State Department knew this wouldn't work, but were ignored by the politicians.

In other words, it *was* the complete shambles that it appeared to be; and we know this because the participants have been leaking like mad on both sides of the Atlantic.

The chaos in Iraq and subsequent bureaucratic blame game makes a striking contrast with the visions of the 9/11 'truth seekers', who offer a variety of conspiracy theories in which nothing went wrong and no one has leaked. Believers in the 9/11 conspiracy theories don't ask themselves how something so astoundingly clever could be organised by the same – or a similar – bunch of morons who invaded a country without any instructions as to what the invasion forces should do next.

Nonetheless, the 9/11 'truth seekers' have been astonishingly successful. Last year, a major poll found that a third of Americans believed that the US government was responsible for 9/11 or let it happen to create a pretext for invading Iraq. [1] Creation of this mass perception has been achieved almost solely by using the Internet; the corporate print and broadcast media have either ignored or denigrated the beliefs of the 9/11 'truth seekers'.

The American military failed to persuade the politicians

In his book *The Threat To Reason* (Verso, 2007), Dan Hind offers a vision of a 'new enlightenment' being created by the Net's communication powers, offering the online encyclopædia Wikipedia as a model for cooperative, rational endeavour. He suggests that this new Net-based, non-commercial, voluntary search for 'truth' will eventually overpower the self-serving lies produced by states and corporations.

I wish I could believe this, but I don't. While the example of the 9/11 theorists shows that it is possible to successfully broadcast alternative versions of reality using the Net, Hind's 'new enlightenment' hinges on the ability of people to assess the reality or truth of such propositions and discard the untrue and falsified. I have seen little evidence of 9/11 researchers behaving as Hind would have them do. False or untenable propositions are not discarded, and evidence which contradicts strongly held beliefs is shunned rather than welcomed. In short, the 9/11 'truth seekers' are behaving just like the rest of us: once we are locked onto a theory, it can be terribly hard to get our minds to shift away from it and look at other potential explanations. [2]

I learned this firsthand about 20 years ago. I thought I'd spotted that someone I believed was a friend of mine was reporting on me to the state – MI5 I guessed, but wasn't sure. Almost immediately after my perception about this 'friend', I bumped into his partner and blurted out my theory about him. She told him, and he wrote me a letter in which he confessed to being a spook. Except he hadn't confessed; he was being sarcastic. So keen was I to have my theory confirmed, I missed the sarcasm. Even when it was pointed out to me, I could not let my belief go; I literally couldn't see what was right in front of me. Eventually, under kindly but intense pressure from two people I trusted, I managed to wrench my mind away from the belief that my friend had actually confessed. It was an enormous effort. (I think I was right about him, incidentally: he *was* a spook. I never met him or heard from him again.)

Changing our minds is hard and gets harder as we get older; and the fact that we have the Internet at our disposal is hardly likely to alter this.

NOTES

[1] www.scrippsnews.com/911poll.

[2] John Rimmer of *Magonia* magazine has noted this tendency among ufologists. See **FT229:27**.

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ARCHÆOLOGY

MATT PATTINSON

PAUL DEVEREUX reports on a seaside discovery, more rock art in Cheddar Caves, weather's impact on current digs, the Clovis controversy, a tiny skeleton and some ancient wall-builders.

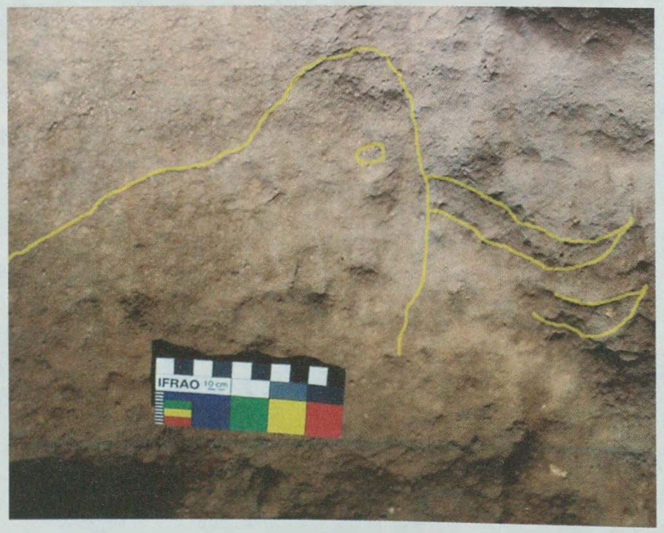
GIVE THE DOG A BONE

ALBANPIX

Daisy the wire-haired dachshund (above) loves to search the shore for whatever the waves offer up, but she amazed her owner, 69-year-old Dennis Smith of Witham, Essex, when she found this 13in (33cm) section of mammoth thighbone at Dunwich, Suffolk. "She just stood there looking at it," said Smith. "There was about 6in (15cm) of it sticking up, so I pulled it out." The fossil bone weighed 8lb (3.6kg) and was dated by Bob Markham, chairman of a local geology group, as 1.75 million to two million years old, from the Pliocene or Pleistocene era. He identified it as belonging to a mammoth, the southern elephant or *Archidiskodon meridionalis*, and it was said to have been washed up from the seabed before becoming embedded in the beach. It may have lain there for centuries before recent heavy seas revealed it. *D.Mail, 3 Oct; Essex Chronicle, 11 Oct 2007.*

A MAMMOTH FIND

The way Palæolithic rock art is suddenly being found in Britain has fortean overtones – after all, the stuff has been around for rather a long time and no one seems to have noticed it before. The latest discovery is on a wall of Gough's Cave, Cheddar, Somerset. This carving depicting a mammoth is reckoned to be about 13,000 years old. The carving, a little larger than a man's hand, is only the second piece of representational cave art found in Britain. Abstract, non-figurative rock engravings have recently been found in the same cave and in nearby Long Hole. Gough's Cave is also where Britain's oldest complete skeleton – the 9,000-year-old "Cheddar Man" – was uncovered. Cheddar Caves director Hugh Cornwell said: "The mammoth carving was found just beyond the daylight zone, where our ancestors ate and slept. It may have been a secret inner chamber, only used by shamans to invoke their animal gods. Now, thanks to special lighting and a small display, all our customers can walk in and admire our mammoth." *Western Daily Press, 14 Aug; BBC News, 15 Aug 2007.*



APEXNEWS.COM / GRAHAM MULLAN

ABOVE: The scratches in the wall appear to depict a mammoth.

FIRE AND WATER

The summer of 2007 was a rum old one: while southern Europe baked in exceptional heat, northern Europe suffered seemingly endless rains and unprecedented flooding. In addition to loss of life and damage to property, such extremes also take an archæological toll. In England, the restorative/investigative work inside Silbury Hill (**FT226:22**), Avebury, had to be held off as the working area was flooding, while the preservation work on the "Dinedor Serpent" (**FT228:22**) was similarly held up. In Greece, on the other hand, the devastating fires there reached the archæological site of Olympia – but though the area surrounding the site was charred and covered in ash, the ruins themselves were saved by firefighters. But the full archæological effects of the weather extremes will take a while to be fully assessed.

JUST A MATTER OF TIME

The standard archæological line is that the first peopling of the Americas was by ancient migrants coming across the Bering Straits from northeast Asia, identified by their use of finely shaped stone spearheads named by archæologists "Clovis points" after the New Mexico town where they were first unearthed. Dated to c.11,000 years ago, these artefacts have given archæologists a timeline against which to measure finds, and any site or artefact claimed to date earlier has tended to become the subject of heated controversy. But now improved technology has enabled more accurate dating (by Texas A&M University and Stafford Research Laboratories researchers) showing Clovis points to be younger than previously thought and therefore could not have accompanied the first Americans. "This will force us to develop a new model to explain the peopling of the Americas," says one of the researchers, Michael Waters. *Scientific American, 22 Feb 2007.*

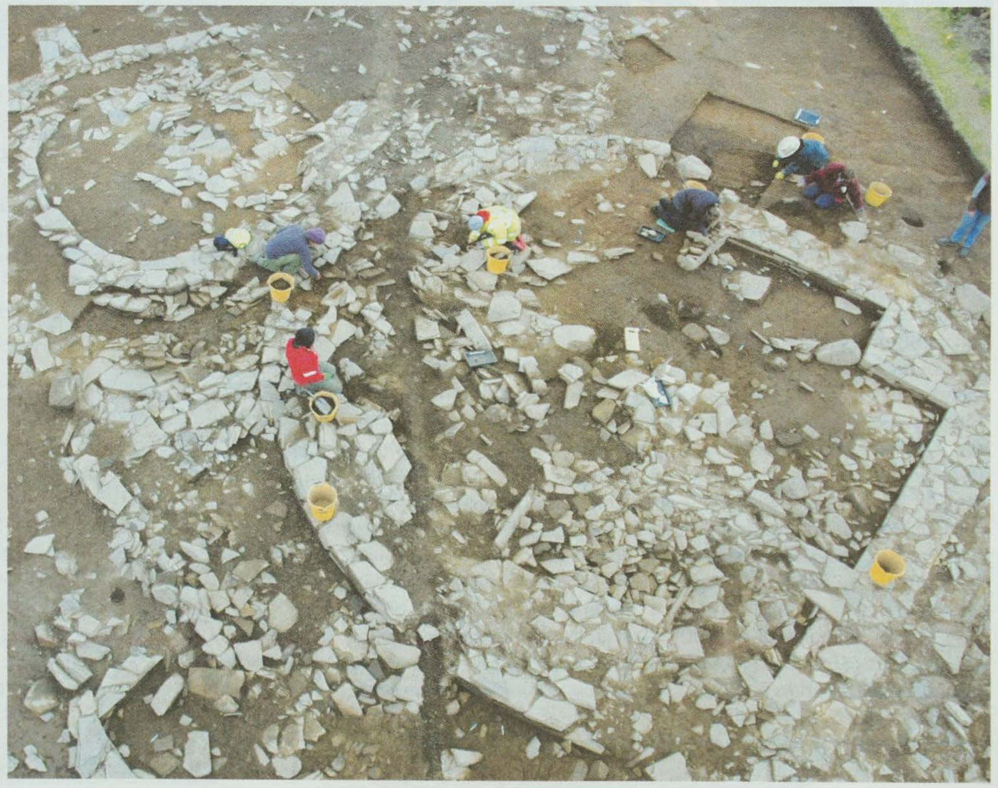
Such a new model is long overdue, for other archæological and genetic evidence has for some time now been signalling that the Americas were populated at least as far back as 25,000 years ago, and very possibly earlier; but conservative opinion dies hard.

STONE WALLING

Two remarkable ancient walls are in the archæological news. One is in Iran, where archæologists have uncovered the remains of a 125-mile (200km)-long section of a great wall in Golestan Province, the longest such ancient feature in the world except for the Great Wall of China. The Iranian wall is believed to have been built to defend against nomadic tribes from Central Asia called the Ephthalites who invaded the region in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. *[UPI] 25 Sept 2007.*

Another, even older and more mysterious wall has taken on significance on Orkney. We have already reported that the remains of a Neolithic settlement and parts of a massive wall had been discovered on the Ness o'Brodgar between the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness [**FT218:20**]. A five-week excavation there has now revealed the remains of large oval stone buildings that are almost certainly temples, along with other, probably domestic buildings. Site director Nick Card comments: "The buildings which we have uncovered are of a kind never seen before." Other findings include a Neolithic mace head and beautifully decorated stones, as well as stone tools and burnt animal bones. But it is the massive wall that is one of the most intriguing features of the site. Geophysical scans of the area previously showed that building to the south of the Ring of Brodgar stopped abruptly and that an area to the north and south was maintained as a definite "no-go" area. "What the excavation has shown is that this building cut-off point... seems to be differentiated by this massive monumental wall," Card explains. The wall has foundations over 5m (16ft) thick, and the most beautiful stonework is incorporated into the side facing the Ring itself. "It wasn't defensive," Card points out. "It was more like a stone barrier, separating the activity on the south-east of the Ness from whatever activity was going on around the Ring of Brodgar." There is much more of the site yet to be unearthed. *Orkneyjar, 16 Aug 2007.*

BELOW: Excavations at the Brodgar site are revealing the remarkably symmetrical foundations of what are thought to be Neolithic temples.



ORKNEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

BABY SKELETON

Here is another candidate for our "skeleton-of-the-year" pseudo-contest: the tiny one of a 3,500-year-old baby unearthed near Peterborough. The discovery was made close to the centre of a Bronze Age burial mound at Pode Hole – a gravel quarry west of Thorney. The infant was under a year old when it died, and may even have been stillborn. It was lying in a grave lined with birch bark, and a complete pottery vessel, with an offering of grain – possibly wheat – inside, was found next to the bones. *The Evening Telegraph, 24 Sept 2007.*

SMORGASBOARD

An assortment of fortean news stories from around the world

ARMED ROBBERY TO GROUP HUG

Around midnight on 16 June, a feast of marinated steaks and jumbo shrimp was winding down and a group of friends was sitting on the back patio of a house in Capitol Hill, Washington DC, sipping red wine. The homeowner, Xavier Cervara, 45, went out to walk his dog and missed the peculiar episode that unfolded. Suddenly, a hooded man in his 20s slid in through an open gate and pointed a handgun at the head of a 14-year-old guest.

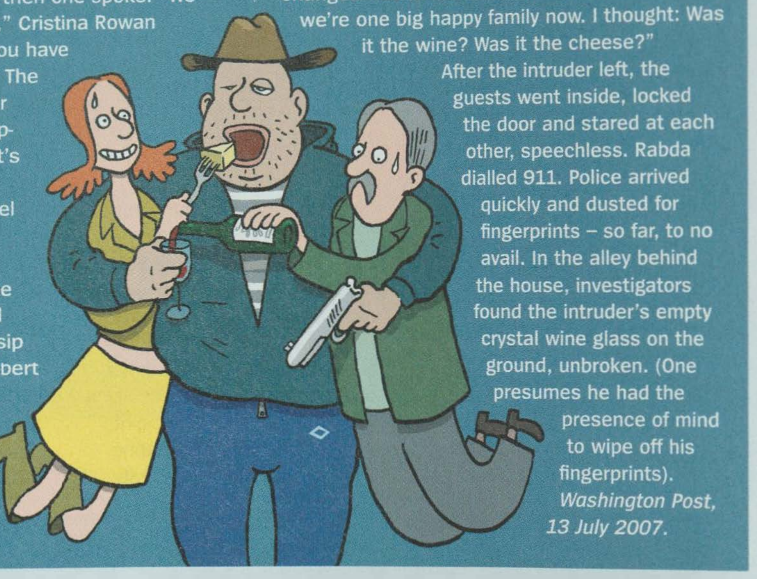
"Give me your money, or I'll start shooting," the man demanded. The five other guests, including the girl's parents, froze – then one spoke. "We were just finishing dinner," Cristina Rowan blurted out. "Why don't you have a glass of wine with us?" The intruder took a sip of their Château Malescot St-Exupéry and said, "Damn, that's good wine."

The girl's father, Michael Rabau, told him to take the whole glass. Rowan offered him the bottle. The would-be robber, his hood now down, took another sip and had a bite of Camembert cheese that was on the table. Then he tucked his gun into the pocket of his nylon sweatpants.

"I think I may have come to the wrong house," he said. "I'm sorry. Can I get a hug?" Rowan stood and wrapped her arms around him. The other four guests followed suit. "That's really good wine," the man said, taking another sip. "Can we have a group hug?" The five adults surrounded him, arms out. With that, the man walked out with a crystal wine glass in his hand, filled with Château Malescot.

Rabau, 51, said the episode lasted about 10 minutes but seemed like an hour. "There was this degree of disbelief and terror at the same time," he said. "Then it miraculously just changed. His whole emotional tone turned – like, we're one big happy family now. I thought: Was it the wine? Was it the cheese?"

After the intruder left, the guests went inside, locked the door and stared at each other, speechless. Rabda dialled 911. Police arrived quickly and dusted for fingerprints – so far, to no avail. In the alley behind the house, investigators found the intruder's empty crystal wine glass on the ground, unbroken. (One presumes he had the presence of mind to wipe off his fingerprints). *Washington Post, 13 July 2007.*



NIX

FOSSETT VANISHES

US adventurer Steve Fossett, 63, who made record-breaking solo flights around the world by plane and balloon, disappeared after taking off in a single-engine aircraft from a ranch south of Smith Valley in western Nevada, at 9am on 3 September. The ranch, 90 miles (145km) southeast of Reno, belonged to his friend, the hotel billionaire Barron Hilton. Fossett intended to search for dry lakebeds suitable for a forthcoming land speed record attempt backed by Sir Richard Branson. He had four to five hours of fuel and wasn't wearing a parachute. He didn't file a flight plan.

An intensive search of 19,300 square miles (50,000 sq km) of rugged terrain failed to find his high-performance two-seat Bellanca Citabria Super Decathlon aircraft, designed for stunt flying. The terrain for hundreds of miles around is extremely dangerous for single-engined planes. Most can't clear the high peaks of the Sierra and instead pick their way through the mountain passes. There are 129 known crash sites in Nevada, but it is estimated that over the last 50 years more than 300 small planes have disappeared in the state.

Besides more than 20 search-and-rescue aircraft in Nevada and the use of high-tech sensors and heat-seeking devices, thousands of Internet users around the world used Google Earth to scan magnified images of the dense terrain. The two-week search turned up the wreckage of at least eight light plane crashes, going back decades, which were never properly logged or investigated at the time. Each site holds clues to the fates of other flyers who went missing in what some are calling the Bermuda Triangle of the western United States. One of the vanished is Charles "Chuggie" Ogle, a real estate entrepreneur who took off from Oakland, California, in August 1964 heading for Reno and never came back. *Irish Independent, 6 Sept; Irish Times, 11 Sept; Independent, 15 Sept; [R] 18 Sept; Economist, 22 Sept 2007.*

NEW MILLENNIUM REACHES ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia uses the calendar of the Coptic Orthodox Church – which means their year 2000 began at midnight on 12 September AD 2007 (2100 GMT on 11 September). Fireworks lit up the sky above Addis Ababa as revellers gathered in the streets for a cultural festival to celebrate Enkutatash, the New Year holiday. Around AD 525, the Roman Church, following the chronology promulgated by Dionysius Exiguus, revised the estimate of the date of Christ's birth by nearly eight years – but Ethiopia stuck with the old estimate. It was partly because the country was so remote and isolated, but also, says the current patriarch, Abuna Paulos I, because Ethiopian Christians are intensely conservative.

Ethiopia is the only African country successfully to resist colonisation. Amharic remains the national language and the calendar is based on an ancient Egyptian system calibrated on the Nile floods, consisting of 13 months – 12 months of 30 days and one month of five epagomenal days, known in one dialect of Coptic as *koudi pabot* ('little month') but in Arabic as *khams al-nasi* ('the five of oblivion'), reflecting the belief persistent throughout Egyptian history that these five days are very unlucky.

Ethiopians also measure time differently. The clock starts when the sun comes up. What is 7am to a visitor is 1am to a local – a quirk that can lead to endless confusion when, for instance, ordering a taxi. *BBC News, 6+10+12 Sept; Guardian, Irish Times, Independent, 11 Sept 2007.*

EGYPTIAN CURSE

Painted stones, said to have been stolen from an unnamed ancient tomb in Egypt's Valley of the Kings, near Luxor, have been sent to the Egyptian embassy in Berlin.

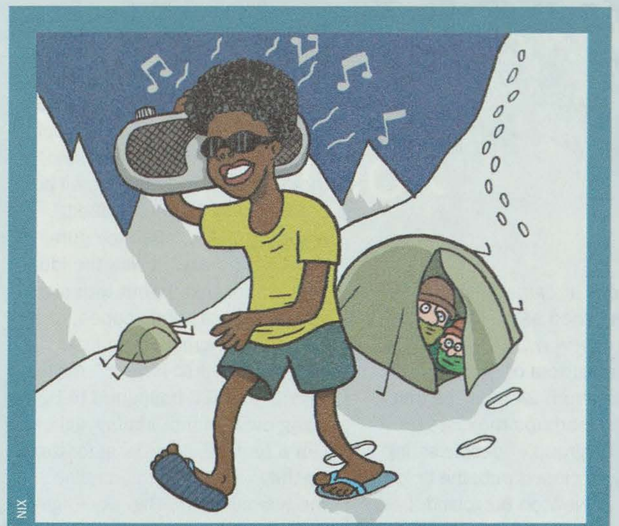
Accompanying the stones was a brief, typewritten letter, explaining that the artefacts were being returned because they had caused the agonising death of the man who had stolen them. The writer told how his stepfather had "managed to prise the stones from a wall decoration and take them back to Germany without anyone noticing.

Shortly after returning home, he suffered an unexplained paralysis from the neck down." Later there were "inexplicable bouts of fever" and eventually cancer was diagnosed. After three years of serious illness, he died.

Seeming quite rattled, the writer concluded: "I feel duty bound to return these stones in order to correct the wrong. Fearing any further unpleasantness, I would like to remain anonymous." Embassy spokesman Mahmoud Gaafar said the stones were being studied to see if they were authentic. "Curse or no curse," he said, "the taking of anything so precious is immoral."

While the report in the *Sunday Express* (2 Sept 2007) refers to "painted stones", the reports in the *Independent* (23 Aug 2007) and *Daily Telegraph* (25 Aug 2007) talk of "the carving" in the singular.

For other supposed curses on stones and artefacts taken from sacred or archæological sites, see **FT28:42, 70:17, 76:57, 106:10, 121:9, 219:44–48.** For the literary history of "the mummy's curse" see **FT161:27**; for a possible fungal explanation for illnesses related to tomb-exploration, see **FT174:24**.



NIX

FROM MALI TO MOUNTAIN

In mid-August, a group of climbers in Spain's snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains encountered a young African clad only in a T-shirt, light trousers and flip-flops, who was striding along, singing. He carried no provisions and introduced himself as Tony Brascons, 27, from Mali. However, he wouldn't tell them, or the police who later detained him, how he came to be so far from home on a rugged mountainside where temperatures regularly dropped below freezing at night.

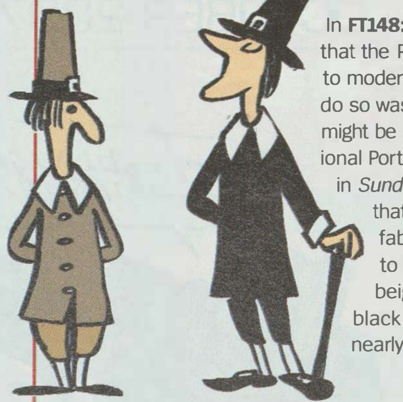
The climbers persuaded him to accompany them to a nearby refuge, a rough stone shelter at Cariguela, 10,500ft (3,200m) up, near the peak of the Veleta mountain, and gave him food and water. Before they resumed their climb, he slipped away, heading towards the Mulhacen (11,424ft/3,482m), the highest mountain in Spain, snowbound even in mid-August. A forest ranger found him near the top, and brought him down 1,000m (3,300ft) to Capileira, where the police were called.

They could find out no more about the African except that he had spent a night on the bare mountain before meeting anyone. Speaking neither French nor Spanish, he managed to explain that he owed his feat of endurance to "strong legs". Police freed him on 17 August, undecided whether or not to repatriate him for having no papers. *Independent, 18 Aug 2007.*

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

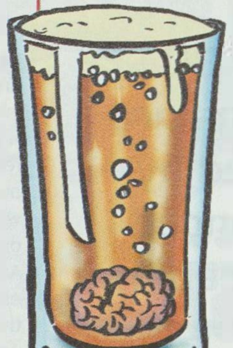
117. UPDATE SPECIAL



In **FT148:28**, I asked whether it was true that the Puritans never wore black – contrary to modern images of them – because to do so was considered flash. A hint that this might be so comes from a curator at the National Portrait Gallery in London (interviewed in *Sunday Times*, 19 Aug 2007) who says that "It takes a lot of dye to make a fabric really black. Much cheaper to produce clothes that are fawn or beige or some other lighter colour. So black clothes in the 16th century were nearly always a sign of prosperity."

ALL ILLOS: HUNT EMERSON

Mythconception 73 [**FT186:30**] discussed the belief that Samuel Pepys wrote his diaries in secret code, and concluded that he didn't. However, the diary (or "Entring Book") of Roger Morrice, a Puritan cleric and journalist, covering 1677–91, has recently been published for the first time, after its rediscovery in 2000. It took that long to decipher because it is, indeed, written in code, presumably due to its criticisms of the Stuart regime. Said its Cambridge University decipherer: "He clearly found it important to conceal his sources and developed a very effective shorthand code." (*Sunday Telegraph*, 5 Aug 2007).



Mythconception 103 [**FT216:17**] dealt with myths concerning the death of brain cells. Here's another: that alcohol kills brain cells. It doesn't, according to good sources quoted at www.linuxlots.com/~fawcett/buzz-excerpt.html#R1.

FT178:28 and **FT190:24** looked at the effects of heatwaves on violent behaviour. A study by the Institute of Psychiatry found that there is a "noticeable rise" in the number of suicides in England and Wales when the average daily temperature tops 18C (64F) (*Morning Star*, 2 Aug 2007).

FT195:15 reported debunkings of the idea that swimming immediately after eating is dangerous. Now, scientists at the University of Surrey and Imperial College London not only reject the fear that exercise after eating can be dangerous, but think that it might prove a useful treatment for obesity by decreasing appetite (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 2007).

ABCD

ALIEN BIG CAT DIARY

MERRILY HARPUR of the Dorset Big Cat Register and Big Cats in Britain presents her bimonthly column of all the Alien Big Cat sightings fit to print with a round-up of activity during September and October 2007.

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2007

A Buckinghamshire man told the Big Cats In Britain group recently: "I was privileged to witness this. I see barn owls, badgers, buzzards and so on every day, but this was special."

It was early autumn this year, and he and a friend had been out lamping for rabbits at Weston Underwood. "We were on a stubble field, working down a hedge line. I was shooting ahead and my colleague was shooting from the passenger seat across to the left, using silenced air rifles.

"I saw movement on the fence line at a distance of 200m (650ft) and immediately knew what I was looking at – I swore! – and told my friend to look. He also swore. We were transfixed and couldn't move.

"It was a black cat, much taller, longer and more graceful than a fox or a dog. It stood in height above the second rung of barbed wire – perhaps slightly taller than a Labrador. Its tail was as long again as its body, very thick, and held still. Its eyes reflected green in the lamp glare. We observed it for about two minutes before it stepped through a depression in the fence and disappeared down into a rough hilly field."

Sightings like these – a good, long look by knowledgeable witnesses – are probably the most fascinating evidence for ABCs on record. As Mark Maylim, a Police Wildlife Officer in Fife, wrote to BCIB last month: "Many sightings in my area are reported by foresters and gamekeepers who are experienced enough to know what they are talking about."

Just such an experienced witness was another lamper, looking for foxes – this time, near Galston, one of Ayrshire's ABC hotspots. His encounter was so unexpected and disturbing that although he is a 16-stone (224lb / 100kg) ex Scots guard (and, as he says, "not afraid of many men") he couldn't help crying.

It was 11.30pm on 25 September. Walking up a field, he saw ahead two eyes shining in the torchlight. He gave a squeak on his lure and slowly approached the spot. The animal was standing in a space in a hedge and didn't move as he approached. When he was about 25 yards distant, he saw clearly that it was a large black panther; his dog refused to go closer, whining and pulling to get away.

...IT'S HELLO MAGAZINE AGAIN WANTING THAT PHOTO SHOOT...
Harpur

MERRILY HARPUR

Many ABC sightings are reported by experienced gamekeepers

Man and ABC stared at each other for some 45 seconds, during which time the cat turned its head slightly to the side, jaw hanging open, and he could see its "bottom fangs and tongue." In his own words "terrified", he slowly backed away and – when he thought it safe to do so – simply ran.

Policemen themselves often see such animals. On 18 September, a Staffordshire officer driving towards Leek "had to brake sharply to avoid hitting what I can only describe as a black panther... It came from nowhere, and vanished as quick, slinking into a driveway..."

Of a plethora of sightings reported from 24 counties this autumn, perhaps the closest was by a group of people sitting outside a closed pub, the Belper Arms, at Newton Burgoland, Leicestershire. Two kid goats from the pub's former pets' corner were tethered nearby, and hearing them become agitated, the witness reported that "one of the ladies went to see what the problem was; then we heard her scream. Three of us ran to see what the matter was, and there was a black panther standing on the other side of the fence on its hind legs, with the front legs hooked over a two and a half foot (75cm)-high wooden fence. It had its ears back and was snarling at the lady. Its tail was swishing back and forth like a cat. It was easily the size of a German shepherd dog but it had a cat-like face and was jet black. We all started shouting and it dropped down on to all fours and slinked off into the hedge nearby."

Dramatically tangible as such creatures clearly are, they apparently do not remain so for long; like the Staffordshire policeman's ABC, they seem to come from nowhere and return there, occasioning scores of fruitless hunts over four decades. Perhaps this month's most ill-starred chase occurred once again on a shooting estate, this time in south Leicestershire, thwarting the best efforts of Nigel Spencer of *Rutland and Leicester Panther Watch*, and Rob Cave, fellow BCIB member and night-vision equipment expert.

An ABC had been reported in the Fleckney area twice in the preceding week, and on Sunday, 9 September at 4.15pm it was again seen, according to local gamekeepers, entering a remote copse surrounded by open fields. It was black but its tail was (anomalously) white-tipped. "At the point of entry, the gamekeepers said, there was a very strong smell but not anything they recognised," recorded Nigel, "and their gundogs went crazy." It was the ideal location for a stake-out with night vision cameras and scopes, to try to catch the creature on film.

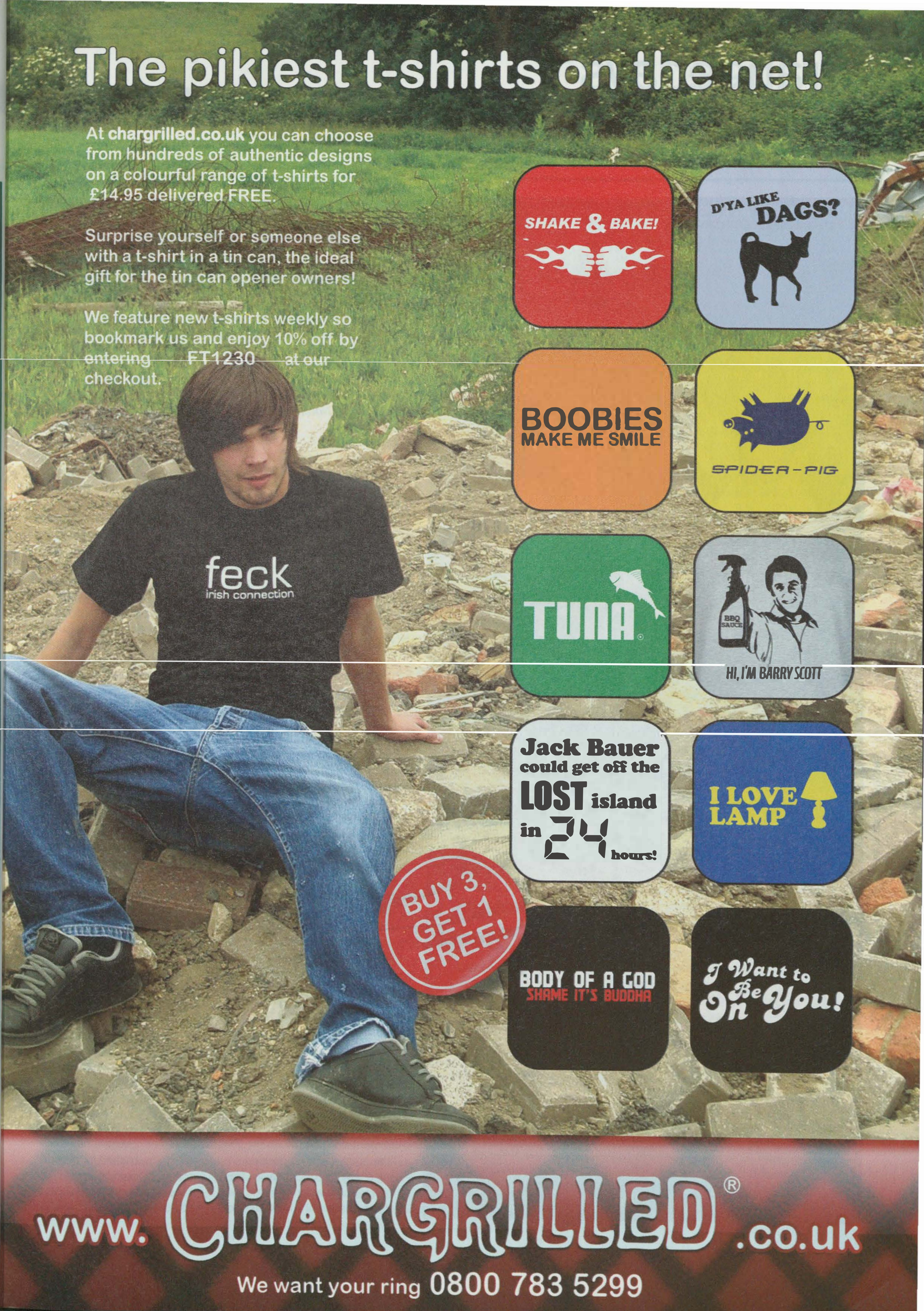
"As luck would have it," recalls Nigel, "the BBC happened to be going over on the Sunday night to film a feature on lamping for foxes so they were keen to combine the two subjects. This would give us two night-vision cameras, one at the front and one at the back of the wood. The idea was the BBC, the gamekeeper and I would squeak [with rabbit distress calls] the front of the wood and film what followed."

As darkness fell, they approached the wood, and soon noticed a movement at its edge. The night-vision scopes, however, revealed not a big cat but an armed poacher – and the expedition abandoned stealth to give chase. "Needless to say, he hid in the wood along with the big cat."

The greatest mystery surrounding ABCs is the absence of bodies or detailed photos. This night was to be no exception: "Despite putting dogs and people in, with night-vision cameras covering the exits, neither poacher nor cat appeared again..."

SOURCES

Big Cats In Britain (BCIB)
www.bigcatsinbritain.org
Rutland and Leicester Panther Watch
www.bigcats.org.uk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WORLD'S TALLEST

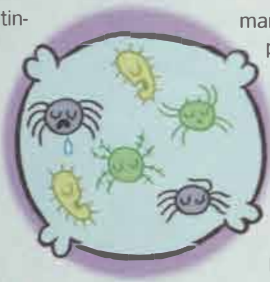
REX FEATURES / WOJTEK LASKI

Up until August, Guinness World Records claimed the world's tallest man was the Mongolian herdsman Bao Xishun, at 7ft 8.95in (236.1cm) [**FT204:20**, **224:7**]; now they have declared Leonid Stadnik (above) as the current record-holder, at 8ft 5.2in (257cm). He had claimed to be the tallest man before, but this wasn't verified because he repeatedly refused to be measured by Guinness officials, regarding his gigantism as a curse. He still has 6in (15cm) to go before he beats Robert Pershing Wadlow, who stood at 8ft 11.1in (272cm) shortly before his death in 1940, aged 22.

Stadnik, 37, who has grown a couple of centimetres since our last report in 2004 [**FT187:28**], is a former veterinarian living in the Ukrainian village of Podoliantsi. He was born to parents of average stature and was not unduly large as a young boy. His growth spurt started at the age of 14 after a botched operation to remove a benign brain tumour. The operation apparently stimulated the pituitary gland, which controls levels of growth hormones. He had to give up his job in 2002, after his feet were frostbitten because he couldn't afford proper shoes for his size 27 feet. In April 2004, he finally got a good pair, paid for by local businessmen. He now gardens, tends his mother's livestock and helps neighbours with their animals. His vision and his legs are both weakened by his condition, and carrying his giant frame around the fields exhausts him. *Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Jan 2006; BBC News, 8 Aug 2007.*

Ig Nobels 2007

From a gay bomb to "the" problem



ILLOS: BURT

The 17th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony took place at Harvard's Sanders Theatre, Massachusetts, on 4 October. As *Nature* has pointed out, the prizes "come with little cash, but much cachet." The event is organised by the magazine *Annals of Improbable Research*.

The linguistics prize went to three Barcelona academics for demonstrating that rats sometimes cannot tell the difference between a person speaking Japanese backwards and one speaking Dutch backwards. The aviation prize went to a couple of Argentinian boffins for their discovery that Viagra aids jetlag recovery in hamsters. Medicine was won by Brian Witcombe and Dan Meyer for their *BMJ* report "Sword Swallowing and Its Side Effects." They discovered that amateurs are subject to sore throats and that practitioners suffer "major complications" if distracted in mid-swallow.

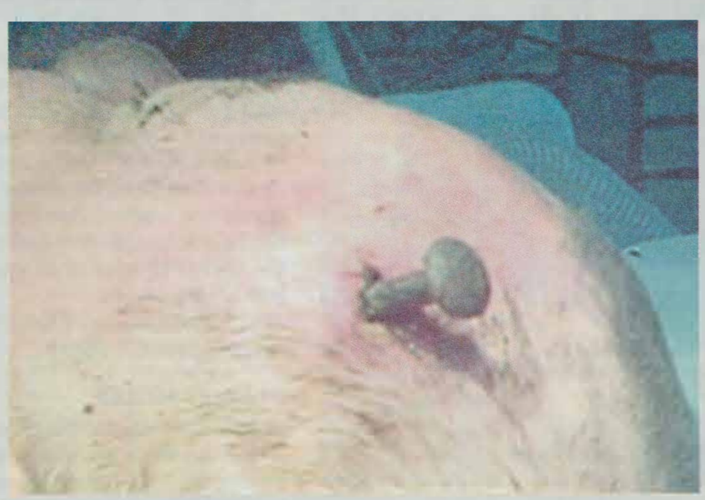
Studies of how sheets become wrinkled won the physics prize, while biology went to a Dutch professor for doing a census of all the mites, insects, spiders, pseudoscorpions, crustaceans, bacteria, algæ, ferns and fungi with whom we share our beds. Mayu Yamamoto took the chemistry prize for developing a way to extract vanilla fragrance and flavouring from cow dung. Toscanini's Ice Cream of Cambridge, Massachusetts, created a new flavour in his honour – Yum-a-Moto Vanilla Twist – and introduced it at the ceremony.

The peace prize went to Air Force scientists in Dayton, Ohio, for research into the so-called "gay bomb", intended to make enemy soldiers become sexually irresistible to each other, and distracted from the task in hand. (It was published in 1994, but was only made public recently.) Australian Glenda Browne won the literature prize for her study of the word "the" and of the many ways it causes problems for anyone who tries to put things into alphabetical order. For an investigation of the limits of human appetite by feeding volunteers a self-refilling, "bottomless" bowl of soup, Brian Wansink of Cornell walked off with the nutrition prize. Wansink is the author of *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (Bantam Books, 2006, ISBN 0553804340). Finally, the economics prize went to Kuo Cheng Hsieh of Taiwan for patenting a device that catches bank robbers by dropping a net over them.

All the research honoured with Ig Nobels has been published in 'proper' scientific journals and full references can be found online at http://improbable.com/ig.

MORE THAN A HEADACHE

You'd think a person would notice when they were shot, knifed or nailed in the head... but that's not always true



Michael Lusher, 37, from Huntington, West Virginia, came home after a night on the town on 19 May and went to sleep in the small hours. About an hour later, at 4.20am, he was shot in the head by a small-calibre bullet, but he didn't realise it until he awoke nearly four hours later and noticed blood coming from his head. The bullet was one of five that someone sprayed across his mobile home and truck. It apparently lost velocity as it travelled through two walls. ***[AP] 21 May 2007.***

A woman in her 20s went out for a night of dancing at a nightclub in Oshawa, Ontario, on 9 February. She left the club unaware of anything wrong but later had trouble sleeping. She eventually noticed she was bleeding from the chest and went to hospital the following morning. She had been hit by a small-calibre bullet. Bullets from smaller guns such as .22-calibre weapons have been missed before. In 1994, Canadian police mistakenly assumed two men in Sherwood Park, Alberta, were electrocuted until an autopsy 36 hours later revealed they'd been shot three times in the head. *[CP] Winnipeg Sun, 12 Feb 2006.*

TWO MEN POLICE ASSUMED WERE ELECTROCUTED HAD BEEN SHOT IN THE HEAD

Glen Thomas Betterley, 53, of Port Orange, Florida, noticed that his head was bleeding when he woke up on 5 January 2006. He asked his partner – Emma Lorene Larsen, 65 – if she had struck him. She said she didn't know. When the bleeding wouldn't stop, Betterley drove to work, left a note for his boss and went to hospital. Doctors found a bullet lodged in his brain. While he was being treated, police called Larsen and heard a gunshot. When they visited the house, they found her dead from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot to the head. ***Shreveport (LA) Times, 11 Jan 2006.***

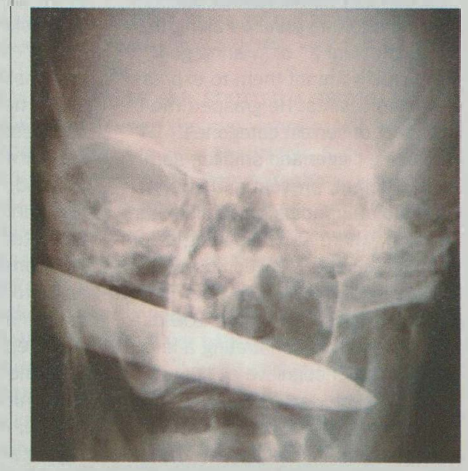
Michael Eugene Moylan, 45, said that he woke up on 27 June with a head pain so severe he suspected he was having an aneurysm and asked his wife to take him to hospital. Doctors found a bullet lodged behind his right ear, whereupon the wife, April, fled. Police later found a gun and bloody rags at the couple's home in the Atlantic coastal town of Port St Lucie, Florida, and Mrs Moylan, 39, told them what had happened. Startled when their burglar alarm went off at about 4am, she grabbed the loaded .32-calibre revolver she always kept under her pillow and it accidentally discharged, shooting her husband in the head. He was hospitalised in stable condition and she was jailed on a weapons violation charge. They told authorities they couldn't simply call 9-1-1 because both are convicted felons and are not allowed to own a gun, so they concocted the headache story. *[R,AP] 27 June 2007.*

Suffering headaches and lack of appetite, Leonard Woronowicz, a 63-year-old man, went to hospital in Bialystock, eastern Poland, where a 12cm (4.7in) knife blade was found lodged in his skull (right). The man suspected he sustained the injury after falling off a kitchen stool while drunk, but noticed no blood and had no major pain at the time. He explained: "I didn't even guess what had happened when the next day I wanted to cut a piece of bread but couldn't find the kitchen knife. Despite carefully searching the room I could only find the handle. But I forgot about it as my headaches got worse over the next few days, and I decided to go to a hospital."

Local doctors were shocked when X-rays of his head revealed the cause of his headache. "The knife blade entered under the right ear near the sideburn and went to the base of the skull near the roof of the mouth," said physician Marek Rogowski. "It stopped on the jawbone. It could have caught major blood vessels and nerves but did absolutely no harm." The blade was removed without any complications and the man left hospital after two days. ***Scottish Standard, 9 Mar 2005.***

Alexander Adamov, 40, from the Ufa region in western Russia, discovered a 4in (10cm) nail sticking out of his head while brushing his hair the morning after a party (top). He told neurosurgeon Ildus Saitov that he had been drinking with his friends and couldn't remember anything about how the nail got there. It hadn't broken any major blood vessels, and Adamov's extreme intoxication had prevented him going into shock. He left hospital a couple of days after the nail was removed, saying he was feeling "absolutely normal". *Mosnews.com, 12 April; D.Record, 14 April 2006.*

In early April 2006, a 17-year-old girl from the Russian city of Taganrog also survived, after a man she met in the street and agreed to have tea with kicked a 4in (10cm) nail into her head. She managed to walk 3km (nearly two miles) to the nearest police station before fainting. And in August 2005, a 37-year-old Russian villager drove the whole length of a 122mm (4.8in) nail into the back of his head, just missing his eyeball, after hearing a voice telling him to do it. He was successfully operated on. ***Mosnews.com, 12 April 2006.***



NECROLOG

We note the passing of a smart bird, the chemist who showed that life's materials can form from simple ingredients and the man who traced the ancient flint trade.

CORBIS / RICK FRIEDMAN

ALEX

This African grey parrot was a pioneer of avian intelligence and one of the great treasures of US scientific research. He could count to six, name seven colours, five shapes, and at least 80 objects. Avian researcher Irene Pepperberg (above, with Alex) bought him at random from a pet shop in 1977 for $600. She set up a project called Avian Learning Experiment, or Alex. She named her new feathered friend Alex and started teaching him, using a method called rival model technique, to spur him to expand his knowledge base little by little. She said he had the emotional maturity of a two-year-old child and the intellectual capabilities of a five-year-old. *FT*'s first report on him was in 1990 [**FT56:9**].

His chief contribution to science was to shatter the notion that parrots can only mimic human speech. He leant to use phrases along the lines of "want X" or "wanna go Y", and clearly meant them to express genuine desires. He grasped the concept of certain categories, including bigger and smaller, same and different, present and absent. The lab at Brandeis University near Boston, where Alex was kept, said in a statement: "Alex combined his labels to identify, request, refuse, and categorise more than 100 different items, demonstrating a level and scope of cognitive abilities never expected in an avian species." Alex enjoyed lording it over two younger African greys in the lab – telling them to "talk better" when they mumbled.

Alex sometimes seemed to be groping for linguistic connections. Soon after first seeing apples, he called one a "banerry" – a word he hadn't heard. "No," said Dr Pepperberg, "apple". Alex persisted: "Banerry," he said, "ban-*err*-eeee" – speaking as his teachers do with new words. It made perfect sense: an apple tastes a little like a banana and looks like a big cherry, fruits he already knew.

In 2005, he spontaneously and correctly used the label "none" to describe an absence of a numeral quantity on a tray – thus grasping a numeral concept akin to zero, an abstract notion that humans do not typically grasp until the age of three or four and one that eluded even the ancient Greeks. Alex was shown a tray on which there were two blue blocks, three green, four yellow and six orange. Dr Pepperberg asked him, "What colour three?" to test his numeral comprehension. "He said 'five', which didn't make sense. So I repeated my question, he repeated his answer a couple of times, and I finally said, 'OK, smarty, what colour five?' and he said 'none'." This prompted a series of trials in which Alex consistently demonstrated the ability to identify zero quantity by saying "none".

Dr Pepperberg saw Alex for the last time on 6 September. They went through their goodnight routine, which always varied slightly and in which she told him it was time to go in his 2ft by 3ft (60x90cm) cage. Alex: "You be good. I love you." Dr Pepperberg: "I love you, too." Alex: "You'll be in tomorrow." Dr Pepperberg: "Yes, I'll be in tomorrow." Next morning he was dead, aged 31. A veterinarian who examined him could find no obvious cause of death; the average life span of an African grey is 50 years. **PS**

Alex, brainy parrot, born 1976; died 6 Sept 2007, aged 31.

STANLEY MILLER

Miller (below) was the biochemist who demonstrated that life's building blocks could be created by electricity. Inevitably dubbed "Doctor Frankenstein" by more excitable journalists, he not only helped to popularise the concept of a "primordial soup", but also tried to come up with the recipe.

He studied chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley, and took his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1950. In 1953, he was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, working with the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Harold C Urey, when he assembled – using tubes, flasks and electrodes – what he perceived to be the building blocks of life. He did so to address the eternal question of how living matter arises from non-living matter. His formula involved combining methane, ammonia, hydrogen sulphide and water vapour, at which he fired electricity, mimicking the effect of lightning strikes.

Urey had initially dissuaded Miller from attempting the experiment, believing it to be futile. But even when Miller found that his process had led to the generation of a combination of organic compounds, including several different amino acids, scientific journals were reluctant to accept his findings. Some scientists believed bacteria had contaminated his apparatus, but repeated and verified tests proved Miller right.

After "A Production of Amino Acids under Possible Primitive Earth Conditions" was published in *Science* in May 1953, the world's media went into a frenzy. Radio astronomy and spectroscopic analysis soon showed that ingredients of his recipe were floating in space and in gaseous planets such as Saturn and Jupiter. A meteorite containing amino acids that plunged into Australia in 1969 also seemed to confirm his exobiological hypothesis.

There were some problems with Miller's findings, as Creationists as well as fellow scientists were swift to point out. It was unclear whether Miller's 'soup' recipe was an accurate reflection of an early Earth, and it was said the degree of electricity he had used would have been the equivalent of an almost permanent lightning strike on our planet. Miller had shown that amino acids and proteins could be created naturally, but he could not – and we still cannot – account for the natural creation of bacteria or amœbæ or synthesise the creation of protocells. Another paper, published shortly before Miller-Urey's experiment, called "A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid" asserted that however important proteins were, the essence of life is really DNA, and its natural existence remains the real mystery. Miller's amino acids were never going to beget life. The authors of that paper were Watson and Crick.

CORBIS / BETTMANN

Miller later moved to Caltech in Pasadena before joining the biochemistry department at Columbia University, New York, returning to California in 1960 to become professor of chemistry at San Diego. He was also an expert on anæsthetics.

Stanley Lloyd Miller, biochemist, born Oakland, California, 7 Mar 1930; died 20 May 2007, aged 77.

Patrick West

GALE SIEVEKING

Gale Sieveking (half-brother of *FT* editor Paul) studied archæology at Cambridge and in 1953 became deputy director of Museums in Malaya, where he opened museums in Malacca, Seremban and Kuala Kangsa, excavated sites of all periods and rescued an exceptional buried hoard of Ming porcelain, including several bowls of imperial quality. In 1954, he featured in Tiffany Thayer's fortean magazine *Doubt*, offering an opinion on the alleged encounters with apemen in Malaya [**FT196:52–53**]. In 1956, he joined the staff of the British Museum, where he became Deputy Keeper in the Department of Prehistory and Romano-British Antiquities.

Perhaps his main contribution to archæology was helping to establish that flint from different localities could be identified by trace elements. This made it possible to map the distribution from individual mines; for example, axes from Grimes Graves in Norfolk (where he carried out extensive excavations) spread across England into France, while French flint travelled in the opposite direction. His excavation of a prehistoric lakeside settlement at High Lodge in West Suffolk in the 1960s occasioned a contest between archæological orthodoxy and the geological succession: geology won. The flake industry there was uniquely early, anomalously predating the level containing hand axes. **PS**

Gale de Giberne Sieveking, archæologist, born Alpes Maritimes, France 26 Aug 1925; died Suffolk 2 June 2007, aged 81.

Other deaths this year that will appeal to lexilinking fortean punsters are those of the hotelier Sir Charles Forte, Baron Forte of Ripley (28 Feb 2007) and John Backus (17 Mar 2007), the inventor of Fortran, the lingua franca of scientific computer programming.

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A MAN WHO SPECIALISED IN FAMILY CONFLICT killed his parents with an axe when they laughed over the death of his cat, Tootie. Stephen Alexander Harper, 44, pleaded guilty in the Supreme Court in Launceston, Tasmania, to murdering Roderick Harper, 88, and Helen Harper, 77, on 30 August 2006. The court heard that Harper believed his mother might have poisoned Tootie. *[AAP] Sydney Morning Herald, 4–5 Aug 2007.*

ANNA HILBER, 69, HACKED HER SISTER Marianne, 80, to death in Trins, Austria, because she moaned about salt in her soup. *Sun, 5 July 2007.*

A FEUD BETWEEN TWO CHINESE TOWNSHIPS over access to valuable wild fungus erupted into a gun battle that left eight people dead and 44 wounded. The violence occurred in the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan province on 13 July. The fungus, known to Tibetans as "summer grass winterworm", grows on mummified moths and is said to cure everything from AIDS to cancer, and to halt ageing. *(Brisbane) Courier-Mail, (London) Metro, 20 July 2007.*

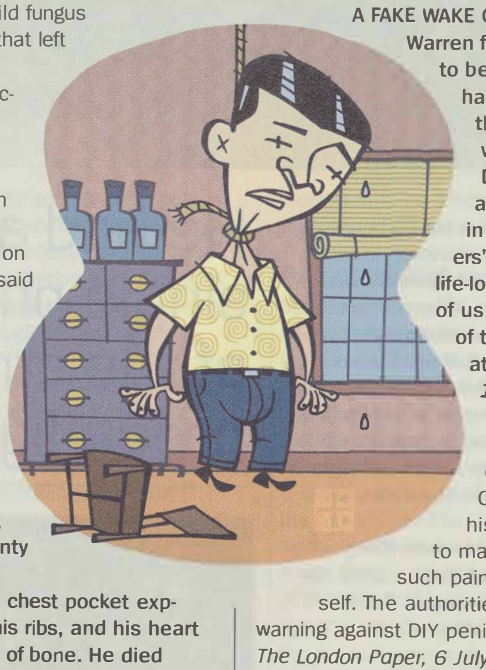
WELDER XIAO JINPENG was working at the Yingpan Iron Ore Dressing Plant in Gansu's Jinta county in western China when a Motorola cell phone in his chest pocket exploded, breaking some of his ribs, and his heart was pierced by fragments of bone. He died at a local hospital. A spokesman for Motorola speculated that the man had been using a fake Motorola phone or battery. *Eve. Standard, 4 July; Western Mail, 5 July 2007.*

A 17-YEAR-OLD JAPANESE BOY WALKED INTO A police station in the town of Aizu Wakamatsu, Fukushima prefecture, some 200km (125 miles) north of Tokyo, carrying his mother's head in his schoolbag. Her torso was later found at the boy's home. He reportedly told police he stabbed his mother on the eve of her 47th birthday as she slept. "It would be good if terrorism and war were gone from the world," he said. "It didn't matter who I killed. I didn't have a grudge against my mother."

Before taking a taxi to the police station, he had spent two hours watching a DVD of a hip-hop group at an Internet café. He lived with his young brother, separately from their parents. Their mother was apparently visiting her sons' rented apartment to do domestic chores at weekends. It was the latest in a series of crimes involving dismemberment that have horrified Japan, regarded as one of the safest societies in the world. Last January, for instance, a student called Yuki cut his sister into a dozen pieces after she told him "You have no dreams". *Brisbane Courier-Mail, 5 Jan, 16 May; BBC News, 15 May; Guardian, 16 May; Queensland Times, 17 May 2007.*

A FAKE WAKE ORGANISED BY DONALD Warren for his 80th birthday had to be cancelled because he had a fatal heart attack the day before. The widower, from Verwood, Dorset, had even hired a coffin to lie propped up in to watch the "mourners". Mike Sherman, 78, a life-long friend, said: "Most of us think the arrangement of the party brought on the attack." *Sunday Mirror, 19 Aug 2007.*

A 35-YEAR-OLD construction worker in Cambodia who injected his penis with hair tonic to make it grow ended up in such pain that he hanged himself. The authorities have since issued a warning against DIY penis-enlargement efforts. *The London Paper, 6 July 2007.*



TERRY COLON

BRENDA SHARPE, 67, SPOTTED A SPIDER dangling between the sun visors of her Peugeot 106 while driving near Theberton, Suffolk, on 29 September 2006. Being arachnophobic, she tried to swat it away, but veered to the wrong side of the road into the path of a bus. Her passenger survived, but she died of multiple injuries. The previous June, David and Sheila Johnson were killed in Shepley, near Huddersfield, when the driver of a minibus veered across the road at a bend and crashed head-on into their Volvo. Andrew Workman, 26, became distracted when a bee flew through his open window and stung him on the crotch. *D.Mail, 2+14 April 2007.*

the UFO files

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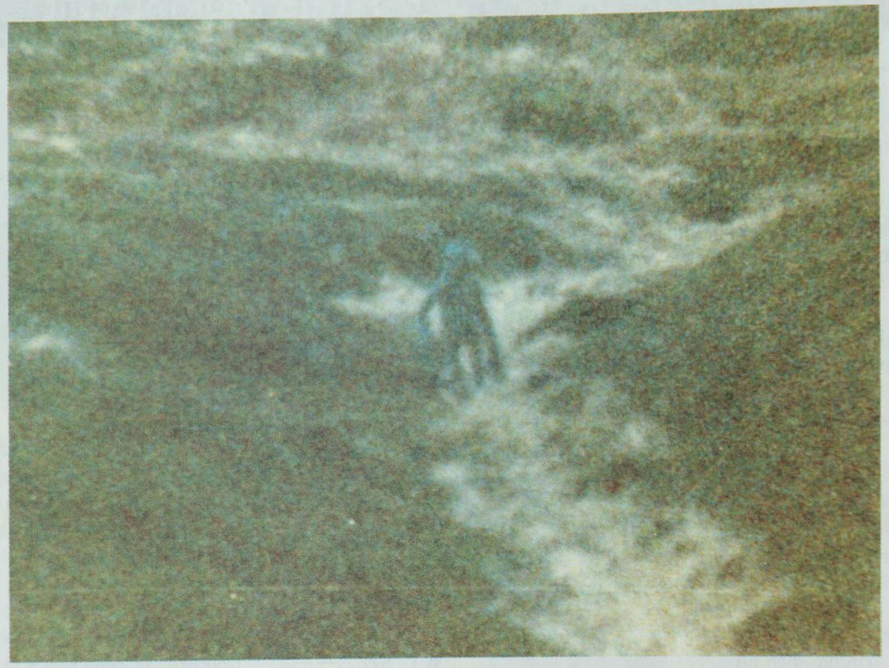
CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES and **PETER HOUGH** revisit a case they first investigated 20 years ago – one that appeared to provide genuine photographic evidence of an alien encounter on the Yorkshire Moors.



BOTH PHOTOS: PETER HOUGH

Alien abductions have always been a major source of controversy. To some, researchers' claims that individuals have been spirited away by alien craft are serious evidence for the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH). Others note that such cases offer little proof of an objective physical reality.

The perfect alien encounter would involve testable hard evidence and a thorough and rapid investigation. If there were a photograph of the being responsible for the abduction – even better!

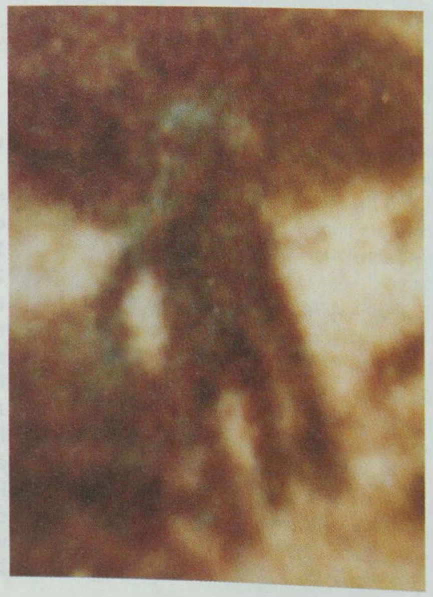
Remarkably, an abduction case fitting these criteria occurred in Britain in 1987. On its 20th anniversary, we reassess the evidence and consider its validity.

ON ILKLEY MOOR WITH CAMERA

At around 7.45am on 1 December 1987, a man in his early 20s was walking up the steep path across Ilkley Moor in West Yorkshire. He intended to watch the dawn rise over the town below, and had taken his camera to capture the sight.

"Philip Spencer" (a pseudonym) had no desire for fame or fortune and has always cooperated with investigators, allowing scientific study to proceed unimpeded. Spencer was a former metropolitan police officer hoping to join the local force, so he would be unlikely to do anything that might jeopardise his career. In these circumstances, faking an alien abduction would seem to be folly.

> He had a single photo of the strange green figure



LEFT AND BELOW: The entity photographed on Ilkley Moor in December 1987.

Here is how Spencer describes what happened on the moors above White Wells in the pre-dawn gloom:

"Something caught my eye. I stopped and turned, looking into a huge hollow scooped out of the top of the hill. About 20ft [6m] away I saw what I can only describe as a small green creature moving quickly away. I thought – what's that? And shouted: Hey! When it was about 40 to 50ft [12–15m] away it turned and seemed to be waving me off. I quickly brought up the camera and took a photograph. Then, and I do not know why exactly, I jumped down the embankment and chased after it."

According to Spencer, the creature, rather like the film character E.T., 'shambled' rather than walked, although it moved faster than he had expected. Spencer scrambled around an outcrop in pursuit to be confronted by something equally extraordinary:

"I saw a large object like two silver saucers stuck together edge to edge [with] some sort of box sticking out of the top of the object that was descending into it. A humming that I had heard previously now became quite loud and the saucer shot straight up into the clouds."

Spencer didn't manage to photograph the UFO before it shot away, leaving him on the moors, confused and fearing a 'breakdown'. He hastened down into Ilkley but saw from the church clock that it was now 10.00am, and full daylight. He felt that it should have been around 8.15 am and Spencer could not account for the time difference.

Realising that if indeed he had photographed the being this would prove, to himself at least, that the episode had not been a hallucination, he took a bus to Keighley where there was a shop offering one-hour film processing. By lunchtime, he had in his hands a single photograph revealing the strange green figure.

Armed with his proof, Spencer found in the back of a book owned by his parents a contact address for Jenny Randles. He wrote to her about his experience, and noted calmly of his photograph: "the quality was poor but there was no doubt. I had captured on film what I saw with my eyes."

Despite giving his real name to Jenny, Spencer included a box number far from Yorkshire for any reply. Jenny discussed the letter with colleague Peter Hough, and they sent a cautious response explaining that they might validate Spencer's evidence. Spencer was impatient, however, and didn't wait for the reply. He went to the library and found a phone number for researcher Arthur Tomlinson and, in late December, met him on the moor. A few days later, Tomlinson phoned Peter Hough and told him of the meeting. Peter immediately recognised the case, and an interview with the witness was arranged. Spencer handed over the negatives from the full roll of film to allow the analysis to begin.

PETER HOUGH

ABOVE: The stand of trees on Ilkley Moor where "Spencer" claims to have been abducted.

LITTLE GREEN MAN

The camera Spencer had used was a 35mm Prinz Mastermatic SLR with a 45mm lens. It was loaded with Kodacolor VR 400 ASA stock. We examined the shots taken before the green man photo, which proved to be of local scenes, matching Spencer's story.

On 11 January 1988, we took the photographic evidence to Tony Marshall, a respected wildlife photographer in Yorkshire. This revealed a number of significant clues. The integral light meter was broken, so Spencer had set the camera for dawn conditions, but the vital shot was seriously underexposed. Immediately this inspired doubts, because the settings should have secured a much better picture, given a dark sky. In fact, this picture seemed to have been shot much later than Spencer's estimate of 7.45am.

Another clue was a tiny white mark on the print above the outcrop behind which Spencer had claimed to see the UFO. While he never connected it to his story, it was in roughly the position where the 'box' atop the UFO might have been located.

Marshall attributed this mark to a scratch on the negative, and after scrutiny suggested that the green entity showed no animation. Given his familiarity with living creatures, Marshall suggested that the most likely explanation was a toy or model. The white blob was later confirmed as a real part of the landscape – not the result of a scratch, but apparently created by a reflection.

A week later, the negative was analysed by a professional company in Greater Manchester with better equipment. They also had reservations and suggested an image of a figure was superimposed onto a background shot of the moor.

On the first anniversary of the case, *FT* columnist Andy Roberts visited the site, close to the original date and time, and a couple of his exposures produced a similar phenomenon. It was a ground reflection on the far bank which only occurred, Roberts postulated, when light conditions and the moisture content of the ground were ideal. He suggested that the witness had faked the photograph, and then noticed the blob without bringing it to the attention of the investigators – perhaps setting a trap to see whether we put two and two together and made a spaceship…

The final analysis, in January 1988, was carried out at the Kodak Laboratories in Hemel Hempstead. Analyst Peter Southerst commented that he "would not care to commit myself to any observation beyond saying that the film has not been interfered with after processing." He eliminated the theory of superimposition and concluded that the figure really *was* something in the hollow.

Further photography at the site revealed that the figure measured approximately 137cm (4ft 6in), but that it was impossible to decide whether it was a life-size model, a child dressed in a suit, or a genuine exotic entity.

At the time, Kodak argued against computer image enhancement because of the cost, and subsequent analysis has been unsuccessful due to the grainy original. Geoffrey Crawley of the *British Journal of Photography* tried in 1990. He had previously analysed the infamous Cottingley fairy photographs (coincidentally taken very nearby). This work helped to establish that those were fakes, but his enhanced images of the Ilkley figure revealed what seemed to be added detail, such as facial features. They proved more likely to be artefacts of the computer techniques applied to the grainy film.

POINTING THE WAY

Spencer had carried a compass with him on the moors as he had only been living in the area for three months and was wary of becoming lost in sudden winter mists. About a week after the experience he discovered that the instrument had reversed polarity – it now pointed south, not north.

On 19 January, Hough and Tomlinson took the compass to The University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, where it was analysed by Dr Edward Spooner, head of the Electrical Engineering and Electronics Department. Spooner soon established that the reversal was permanent, and attempted to recreate the effect using a strong magnetic field. It required a magnet of the sort of strength then only available from industrial suppliers.

Methods using electricity to generate an electromagnetic field were devised. A pulsed field did effect reversal, but required some knowledge of physics and was dangerous to boot – in the final test carried out by Spooner there was a small explosion.

The scientist suggested that the best way to decide whether the reversal was created as part of a hoax or occurred during a real encounter was to have a professional analysis carried out into the magnetic fields around White Wells. Liz Kelly of the Radiolog

PETER HOUGH

LEFT: Liz Kelly of the Radiological Protection Service takes radiation readings at the site.

The two odd men carried photo ID cards from the MoD

ical Protection Service agreed to assist, and Peter Hough took her up onto the moor where she gathered readings of the area and collected rock and soil samples. Any powerful EM field – if that was what had reversed the polarity of the compass – ought to have affected the surrounding moors. But Kelly, working only a few weeks after the incident, found nothing beyond normal background levels.

MEN FROM THE MINISTRY

A further strange twist in the case occurred on 15 January, when Spencer phoned Hough late at night to claim that two odd men had visited him at home. They were middle-aged and carried photo ID cards that identified them as from the Ministry of Defence. Using the names Jefferson and Davies, one sat almost silent as the other asked questions about the sighting. Spencer told them a photograph had been taken, but they were not interested in obtaining it.

Spencer was agitated because only the present authors, Tomlinson and one of his colleagues knew his real name and address, and feared that we had contacted the authorities. He had to be assured that we were respecting his confidence.

Early the following morning, Spencer called Peter again to allege that a national newspaper had phoned him and intended to write about the case. Spencer now wanted to abandon all further study and reclaim his evidence.

Jenny spent the morning talking to Spencer and his wife, seeking to calm the situation, but before doing so had discreetly called the Manchester and London offices of the newspaper in question and was unable to find anyone with any knowledge of the UFO story. Indeed, she had to put the phone down when the paper got too curious.

Spencer was persuaded to let investigation continue. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence has never confirmed it had any involvement.

INSIDE THE SPACESHIP

Spencer had been having dreams of seeing constellations and wondered if hypnotic regression would reveal anything he could not consciously remember. Clinical psychologist Jim Singleton agreed to explore Spencer's story using hypnosis. Although the investigators were not allowed into the room, the session was taped.

During the session, the confusion over the timing of the photograph was seemingly resolved – it was taken at the *end* of a much longer and more complex experience than was consciously remembered, perhaps as late as 9.30am. Under hypnosis, Spencer revealed that he had been approached by the being earlier in his walk and taken into the UFO. There he was examined and given a tour, during which the compass was affected by a gyroscope. He was shown a 'film' which apparently predicted future events affecting his life. Afterwards, he was put back on the moor with no memory of what had occurred over the previous hour and a half, and took his picture of the being returning to the craft.

The psychologist was certain that Spencer was not faking the state of hypnosis and was recalling something that he believed had really happened. But Jenny had been present at several other regressions and felt that Spencer seemed more detached than other witnesses had. Spencer's testimony also featured things reported before – which either supports his story or suggests it could have been created after reading UFO books.

FINAL THOUGHTS, 2007

So what can we conclude about a case that, on the face of it, promised so much?

Despite our best efforts, the evidence is ambiguous. Either the photograph shows a small green entity or it is a life-size doll carried up onto the moors deliberately. Either the compass was affected by an electromagnetic field associated with a UFO or Spencer had the knowledge to convincingly fake it. Despite the psychologist's belief, the hypnosis testimony could either have been faked or was an internal fantasy persuasive to Spencer; and, as such, a version of the truth.

However, there are some interesting new pointers. When Peter Hough asked Mrs Spencer what she thought of the photograph, she replied: "When I look at it, I know it is impossible. Yet I know that my husband is an honest person."

Mrs Spencer also told Peter that she was a witness to the two strange men who came to the house to question her husband, although she was getting the children ready for bed and therefore did not sit in on the interview. She would neither confirm nor deny this story to Jenny Randles the day afterwards.

There is also an interesting detail in Spencer's account gleaned under hypnosis. After being paralysed by the entity, he is taken to where the UFO is in the hollow. At that point, he blacks out and then finds himself in a white room. Spencer does not describe actually going into the object. At that time in the late-1980s, only a few researchers, including ourselves, had noted that most abductees do not recall a point of entry into the craft. This phenomenon became known as 'doorway amnesia' (**FT192:31**), and generally marked out a genuine case from a fantasy or a hoax.

On the other hand, despite the modern myth of extraterrestrials as 'little green men', the case has almost no historical correlation with actual reported UFO abductions.

At the time of Spencer's regression experience, his marriage was going through difficulties, and the couple separated soon after the investigation. Apparently, this process was quite amicable and they eventually divorced. Not long afterwards, Spencer moved abroad.

In late 2004, Philip Spencer's daughter, a small child in 1987 but now in her early 20s, discovered her father's involvement in the case. She asked her mother if it was true, and, despite what she had said at the time, her mother now claimed that Spencer had created the figure from chicken wire and made up the story in order to see if he could "fool the professionals".

From early 1988, we had argued that one credible explanation for the case being a hoax was that it was intended as a test to dupe investigators – and Mrs Spencer, as well as Philip, knew that we had said that. Since 1988, Peter Hough has kept in touch with Spencer, and knew that some animosity had built up between the couple concerning the children. Was Mrs Spencer now telling the truth, or getting back at her husband?

Peter spoke to Spencer about this latest development, trying to make it easy for him to now confess in light of what his ex-wife was saying – but he stuck to his story.

So, is Philip Spencer just a hoaxer who found it too difficult to back down once the story became so well known? We still have not established the answer to this question; all we can do is present the facts and leave others to make up their own minds. But it should be noted that Spencer never wanted any publicity, still protects his anonymity, gave away the copyright of his notorious picture to Peter Hough, and has refused thousands of pounds in fees offered by the media.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

JENNY RANDLES and **PETER HOUGH** have each been responsible for a large number of books on ufology and other fortean themes, and have also collaborated on many, including *Life After Death and the World Beyond*, *Spontaneous Human Combustion*, *Looking For The Aliens* and *The Complete Book of UFOs*.

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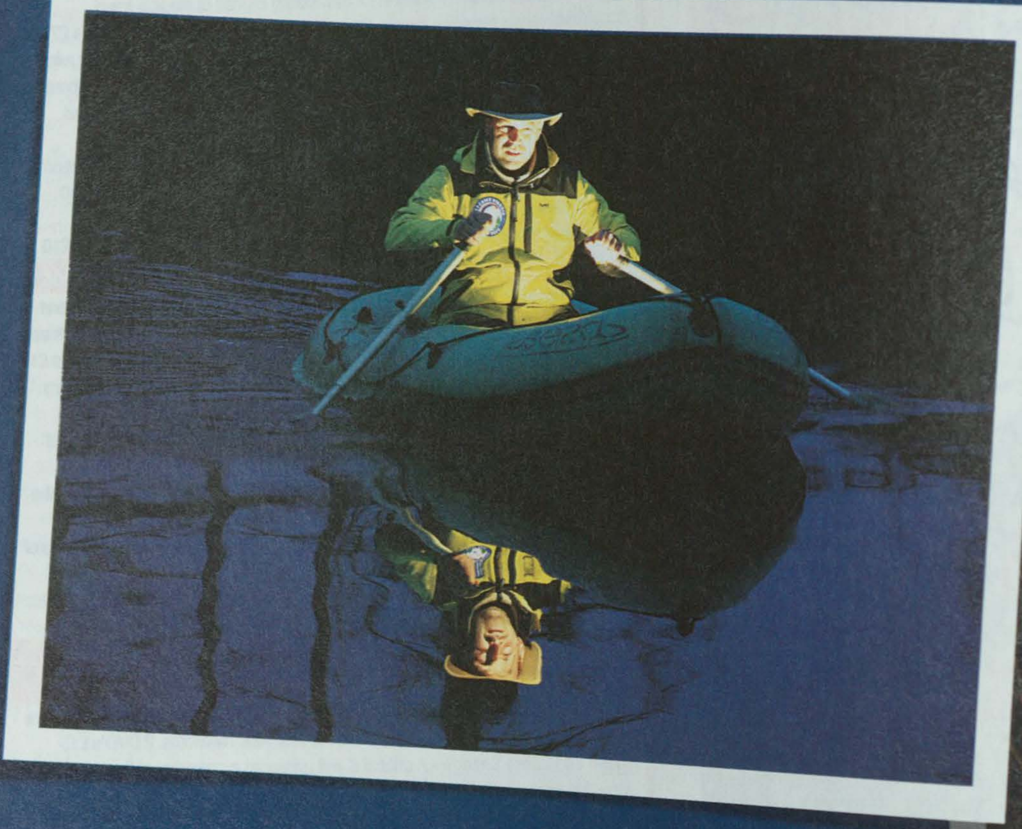
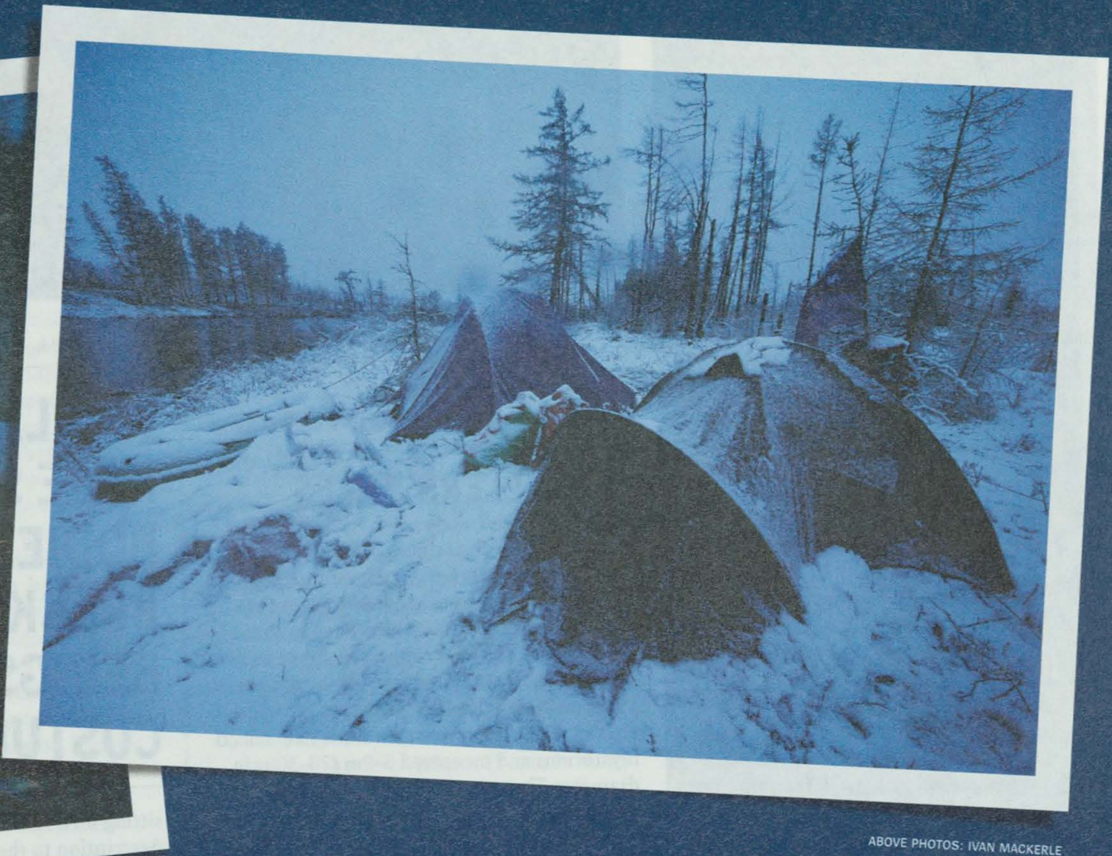
VALLEY OF DEATH





ABOVE PHOTOS: IVAN MACKERLE

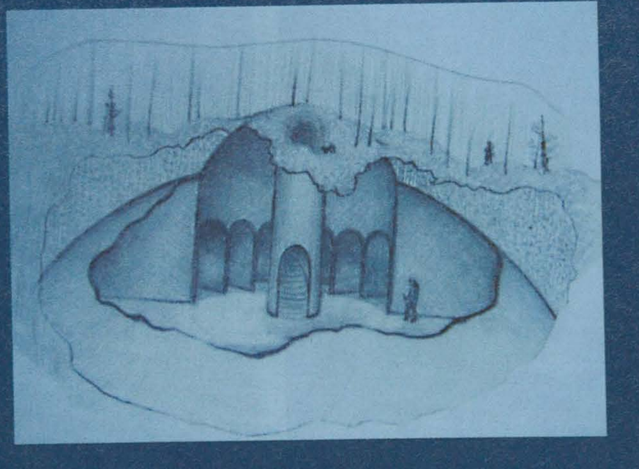
There have been plenty of claims concerning strange artefacts of extraterrestrial origin or of materials unknown to science which make us ask: "Why doesn't someone go and check them out?" Well, Czech explorer **IVAN MACKERLE** does just that. In 2006, his intrepid team dared to enter a notorious 'Valley of Death' in Siberia to investigate tales of strange structures left there by alien visitors or ancient demons.

The Siberian taiga is a vast stretch of mainly barren coniferous forest as unspoiled and unexplored as the Amazon jungle, and more than 100,000 sq km (39,000 sq miles) in western Yakutia are completely uninhabited. Devoid of any sort of trails, the terrain is mostly thick forest, full of uprooted trees, sprawling swamps and swarms of mosquitoes. In short, it's an ancient wildwood – an ideal setting for myths and legends about strange creatures and anomalous zones where bizarre things happen. Even the local wild man – *Chuchuna* – is far from exceptional here, and the most fascinating mystery of all is a strange legend about a terrible 'Valley of Death' filled with unnatural, dome-shaped structures.

IT'S AN IDEAL SETTING FOR LEGENDS ABOUT STRANGE CREATURES AND ANOMALOUS ZONES

Local traditions record that lone hunters from the nomadic Evenks and other Yakutians who wander into these weird valleys – there could be more than one – have described odd hemispherical 'iron houses' (*kheldyu*) that protrude from the perpetually frozen ground. These smooth, reddish formations often have an opening at the top, with a winding stairwell leading down to a circular gallery with numerous 'metal' rooms. Despite temperatures of 40 below outside, the interiors are said to be pleasantly warm. The old Yakutians do not know the origin of these 'houses' or to whom they belong. They vaguely associate them with the ancient demons of the taiga, *Niurgun Bootur* and *Tong Duurai* (see panel 'Yakutian Legends').

These mysterious structures – the locals also refer to them as *olguis*, or upturned 'cauldrons' – are said to be forged out of an unknown metal, copper-like in colour, incredibly hard and with razor-sharp edges. No one has ever been able to cut off even a fragment. Over time, the Yakutians have noticed that some 'cauldrons' are gradually sinking into the frozen ground and disappearing, leaving behind large circular stains of odd vegetation. These places are dangerous to all living things. Stay too long and your head will spin; you'll be struck by an unknown fatal illness. For this reason, tribal elders long since proscribed



IVAN MACKERLE

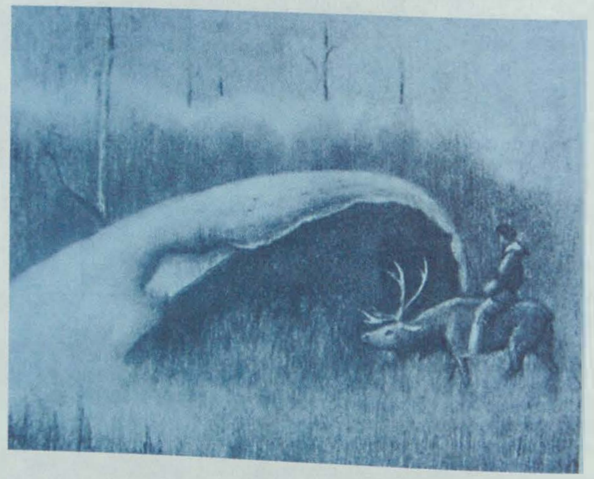
ABOVE: A bird's eye view of Siberia's 'Valley of Death'. BOTTOM: The 'cauldron' found by a geologist in 1936.

such areas, declaring them cursed. The region is called *Uliuiu Cherkechekh* – the Valley of Death.

TRAVELLERS' TALES

There are modern tales of travellers who stumbled upon the taiga cauldrons. Some sound plausible, others more outrageous. Mikhail Korecky from Vladivostok wrote to the newspaper *Trud* that he'd been to the Valley of Death three times. The first was in 1933, when he was 10 years old; the second in 1937; and finally in 1947 with some friends. He saw a total of seven 'cauldrons'; all looked mysterious and measured 6–9m (20–30ft) in diameter. The vegetation around them was peculiar, more lush than the surrounding plants, with giant burdock leaves, long stalks and weird grass twice as tall as a man. On the last visit, Korecky and his companions spent the night in one 'cauldron'; although nothing dramatic occurred that night, one friend lost all his hair within a month and Korecky developed two small pustules on his cheek which never healed.

In 1936, a geologist visiting the Olguidakh River (the "place with a cauldron"), found a 'cauldron' that was not completely submerged. A smooth hemisphere of metal 2cm (0.8in) thick and with razor-sharp edges, it was reddish in colour. Barely a fifth of it was above ground and the opening in its vault was accessible to a person sitting on a reindeer. The geologist sent its description to the capital city Yakutsk, but no one paid any attention.



A discovery by an old Evenki hunter met with similar lack of interest. In 1971, he claimed to have found an "iron burrow" in the ground in which he saw the bodies of skinny, black, one-eyed beings in "iron costumes". No one believed him, despite his willingness to show them to anyone who was interested. Unfortunately, he has since died.

> HE CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN THE BODIES OF SKINNY, BLACK, ONE-EYED BEINGS IN 'IRON COSTUMES'

Not until 1979 did a serious archæological expedition set out from Yakutsk. Despite the fact that it had a guide – an old settler who had seen the 'cauldrons' in his youth – the expedition failed to locate them. The area where they were said to be had changed dramatically in the intervening years. The vegetation had grown so thick that one couldn't see more than 10 steps ahead, making discovery a matter of luck.

Russian ufologists have proposed that these 'cauldrons' are the remains of UFOs, wrecked in an accident or an ancient aerial battle. Russian researcher Dr Valerey Uvarov argues that they are connected to a power plant located deep inside the Earth, a weapon to protect our planet from dangers in outer space. Extraterrestrials built them in ancient times, he says, and now they operate automatically, having shot down the Tunguska meteorite in 1908, the Chulym meteorite in 1984, and most recently, the Vitim meteorite in 2002. Today, he alleges, the radiation levels in the area are rising again and wildlife is leaving the woods as if in preparation for some imminent event.

INTO THE VALLEY

The little-known and still unsolved mystery of Yakutia's Valley of Death and its 'cauldrons' mesmerised me. Were they natural formations? If they were artificial, who built them and for what purpose? The strange illnesses of those who linger near the 'cauldrons' suggested heightened levels of radioactivity. It was little wonder that so few ventured in search of them; the shortage of real information and the remoteness of the region added expense to the danger. But, to explore the dreaded Valley and find the mysterious metal hemispheres before they all disappeared deep beneath the earth would surely be a worldwide sensation. My team didn't believe in the UFOs or the black, one-eyed beings: our first concern was to discover whether the 'cauldrons' truly existed, and if so, what they were.

Our biggest problem was figuring out how to locate the 'cauldrons' in the vast, impenetrable taiga. The best information we had about the location was a vague notion that they lie somewhere along the Olguidakh River, a tributary of the Viliuy, deep in the taiga. Eye witnesses who could lead us there were suddenly nowhere to be found. Blindly wandering on foot was bound to be a failure. The only viable solution was a birds-eye exploration at a time of year when the snow had melted and the trees were without obscuring leaves. A pilot could explore in an hour what would take a month on foot. He could fly over a selected area and videotape the landscape below him for any anomalies.

But we couldn't afford a helicopter; just one hour would cost $1,500. Jirka Zitka, our pilot, had access to a powered hang-glider, but after much deliberation, we rejected this option. It would be too difficult to take off in such a thickly wooded region, or to land the craft in an emergency. In the end, we opted for a motor paraglider – in practice, a motor-propelled parachute – which could take off and land in a small area.

Our transport abandoned us under a bridge over the Olguidakh and took off down the dusty road towards the town of Mirnyj. I sat on a stuffed field-rucksack, wondering how we were to penetrate the taiga while probing both sides of the river. We couldn't carry the immense load of equipment and 14 days' worth of provisions on our backs. Even the best equipped 'off-road' could not traverse this pathless jungle. Instead, we chose a well-tested mode of wildwood transportation – the river. We blew up an inflatable raft, which was soon to become our most irreplaceable companion, and put all our gear and supplies on a second smaller inflatable boat.

Our guide was Sláva Pastuchov, a materialist who did not believe in legends and who came with us to fish, hunt and, most importantly, help us survive. An experienced hunter, even he felt uneasy as we sailed through an eerie, dead land of bare and broken trees. He soon left us, hurrying away.

They say that the Valley of Death is really a whole chain of valleys around the riverbanks. In order to explore the entire 200km

IVAN MACKERLE

ABOVE: Aerial exploration of the Siberian taiga in a motor paraglider.

WEIRD GUIDE TO SIBERIA

LABYNKYR "NESSIE"

In 1953, geologist Victor Tverdokhlebov and a companion spotted a huge creature swimming quickly and jerkily across Lake Labynkyr in eastern Yakutia. When reports of the sighting emerged, public curiosity was piqued, and expeditions embarked on largely fruitless hunts for the Labynkyr "Nessie". Locals weren't surprised by the sighting, and speak of animals pulled down into the water never to be seen again. Suggestions as to the true identity of the mystery monster include a gladiator dolphin somehow stranded in a freshwater lake miles from the nearest ocean, and a giant pike. *A Study Guide to UFOs, Psychic and Paranormal Phenomena in the USSR, Antonio Huneeus, 1991, p98–99.*

SIBERIAN YETI?

Sergey Sememnov was climbing in the Altai Mountains in September 2003 when he found a furry limb with a padded paw. It was said that the bones were several thousand years old, and that the mummified limb "looks very human". Despite talk of it belonging to a yeti – there have been many reported sightings of the hairy hominid in the area – *FT*'s Karl Shuker suggested it was most probably just a bear's paw. **FT179:12**; *www.gazeta.ru, 8 Oct; BBC News, Sky News, 9 Oct 2003.*

INCORRUPTIBLE CORPSE

In 1927, the 75-year-old 12th Pandito Hambo Lama (spiritual leader of Russia's Buddhists), Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov, told his followers that he was going to die. He instructed them to look at his body in 30 years, and then, meditating and chanting a prayer for the dead, he died. His corpse was duly exhumed as directed and found to be still in the lotus position and incorrupt. Given the restrictions on the practice of Buddhism under the Soviets, his coffin was then packed with salt and reburied, before being dug up again on 11 September 2002. The corpse was still perfectly preserved, and now sits at a table surrounded by candles and bowls of oils in Ivolginsk Monastry. Believers credit its incorruption to Itigilov's heightened state of existence achieved through meditation. **FT184:26**; *NY Times, 1 Oct 2002.*

ICE MAIDEN

Inhabitants of the remote, mountainous Southern Altai region blamed a series of earthquakes starting in September 2003 on the exhumation of a mummified Caucasian woman dubbed the 'Ice Maiden' as her corpse had been preserved by water seeping into her burial chamber, then freezing. Suicides and sickness have also been blamed on the exhumation, and locals campaigned for her reburial in order to lay the spirits to rest. Even the archæologists spoke of a strange foreboding among the team, and of nightmares; a helicopter crash-landed while transporting the mummy to Novosibirsk, and when it arrived there it was almost ruined by fungi it developed as a result of having been put in a freezer previously used to store cheese. **FT186:09**. *[AFP] Times, 2 April; D.Telegraph, 17 April 2004.*

ALIEN ALESHENKA

On the evening of 13 August 1996, it is said that in a small village near Kyshtym, Chelyabinsk, pensioner Tamara Vasilievna Prosvirina heard a voice telling her to go to the cemetery. There she found a 25cm (10in) tall creature in a grave. The being, which she named Aleshenka, had claws, large eyes and holes instead of ears, and was grey with brown spots. The woman looked after it until she was taken to a psychiatric hospital; after her departure, the creature died. It was eventually discovered and examined by doctors. Despite speculation that it was an alien, and that it was later taken away by a UFO, it seems most likely that it was a premature female infant with severe deformities. Tamara Prosvirina was killed in a car accident trying to escape hospital. *Pravda, 18 Feb 2004.*

DRILLING TO HELL

A 1989 article in a Finnish monthly claimed that geologists in Siberia had found their drill spinning wildly, and recorded temperatures of 2,000 degrees F (almost 1,100 deg C), at a depth of 14.4km (8.95 miles). Microphones were lowered and picked up the sound of screaming voices. Later reports added that luminous gas and a "brilliant being with bat wings" came out of the hole. The story of Hell's discovery turned out to be a hoax that was picked up and propagated by the American Christian fundamentalist press. **FT72:42**.

"STONE AGE FAMILY"

A team of Soviet geologists flying over southern Siberia in 1978 saw a gap in the forest below; closer inspection revealed a wooden cabin, the home of Karp Lykov, 80, and his family. Inspired by his fundamentalist Orthodox beliefs, Lykov had left society with his wife and two children in 1936 and set up home near the Abakan River, 220 miles (355km) of dense forest away from the nearest village. The family had no other human contact for 42 years and lived a primitive lifestyle. Two more children were born in the wild. Lykov's wife died in the Fifties; the rest of the family, except one daughter, succumbed to infection after discovery, having no immunity against disease.**FT45:52**, **FT126:10**. *D.Telegraph, 9 Mar; Guardian 14 Mar 1999.*

Jen Ogilvie

TUNGUSKA METEOR HUNT

In August, Russian police were searching for a meteorite weighing three tons that had been stolen from a space display in Krasnoyarsk, northern Siberia. According to the AFP report (11 August): "The rock is believed to be part of a meteor that exploded in 1908, flattening 2,000sq km (770sq miles) of Siberian forest." This refers to the celebrated Tunguska event of 30 June 1908, when something – meteor, asteroid, comet, black hole or spaceship – hurtled through the atmosphere and is believed to have detonated some three to six miles (5–10km) above the ground with an energy equivalent to about 20 million tons of TNT. The explosion was so bright it lit up the sky in London. Small fragments of the body should have survived the airburst and made it to Earth; oddly, however, no crater or even the slightest trace of the impactor has ever been found – this at least is the general consensus. So what had been stolen from Krasnoyarsk? Could it possibly have been one of several large iron meteorites that fell at Sikhote-Alin in Siberia in 1947?

According to Vladimir Shaidurov, an expert on mathematical modelling, the Tunguska blast was the trigger for current global warming when it fundamentally damaged thin, high clouds, letting in more solar energy. No one appears to agree with him. Even wilder speculations come from Yuri Lavbin (or Labvin), president of the state-funded Tunguska Phenomenon Research Foundation, concerning quartz boulders allegedly found in the Podkamennaya Tunguska river, near the site of the blast. "On the surface of the rocks were strange signs, apparently caused by technological means, possibly with the use of plasma," he said, adding that analysis of the boulders showed impurities that didn't come from this planet. He believes that an "information container" from another galaxy broke up as it was attempting to land on the Earth, leaving behind a few fragments. Three years ago, his Foundation discovered a 50kg (110lb) rock that it claims is the first substantial debris from the explosion. The scientific community remains singularly unimpressed.

In June 2007, Italian researchers announced an interesting discovery from the 50m (164ft)-deep Lake Cheko, five miles (8km) north-northwest of the centre of the Tunguska destruction. "When we looked at the bottom of the lake, we measured seismic waves reflecting off something," said Giuseppe Longo, a physicist at the University of Bologna. "Nobody has found this before. We can only explain that and the shape of the lake as a low-velocity impact crater."

During an expedition to the lake in 1999, Longo's team was looking for meteoroid dust in its submerged sediments. While sonar-scanning the lake's topography, they were struck by its cone-like features. "Expeditions in the 1960s concluded the lake was not an impact crater, but their technologies were limited," Longo said. During their latest exploration, the team took 1.8m (6ft) core samples from the lakebed, revealing fresh mud-like sediment on top of "chaotic deposits" beneath. "To really find out if this is an impact crater," Longo said, "we need a core sample 10 metres [33ft] into the bottom" in order to investigate a spot where the team detected a "reflecting" anomaly with their seismic instruments. They think this could be where the ground was compacted by an impact or where part of the meteorite itself lies. If it exists, the object could be more than 10m in diameter and weigh almost 1,700 tons.

Dr Gareth Collins, a research associate at Imperial College, London, pointed out that the Cheko feature was "anomalously" shallow and lacked the round shape of most craters – being more elliptical in form. Such craters only occur if the impactor's angle of entry is less than about 10 degrees. "We know from modelling of the Tunguska event that the angle of entry must have been steeper than that," he said. Longo's team plan to return to the lake next summer, close to the centenary of the event.

Scotsman, 15 Mar 2006; Irish Times, 20 April; SPACE.com, BBC News, 26 June; Times, 11 Aug 2007.

Paul Sieveking

YAKUTIAN LEGENDS

Yakut legends contain many references to explosions, fiery whirlwinds and blazing spheres rising into the air, and all of these phenomena are associated with the mysterious metal constructions found in the Valley of Death. Much of this is recounted in epic poems about events in a remote time when the area was inhabited only by a few Tungus nomads.

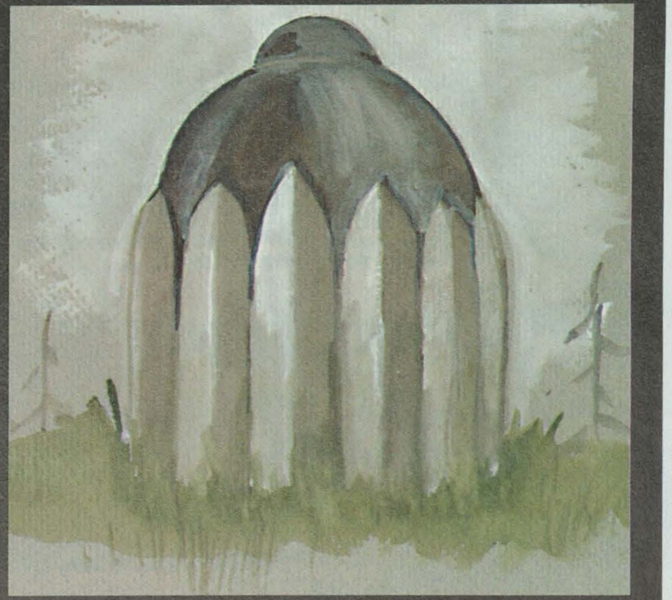
Once upon a time, their distant neighbours noticed that Yakutia was suddenly shrouded in impenetrable darkness as a hurricane of terrible force shook the land with a deafening roar, and lightning crossed the sky in all directions. Later, when the darkness dispersed, the nomads beheld an utterly strange sight; set on the scorched land was a towering structure, glowing in the sun and visible at a distance of many days' journey. Over a long period, the structure gave out unpleasant, ear-splitting noises as it gradually sank into the ground. In its place was an immense, yawning, vertical "orifice" which, according to legend, contained three tiers of "laughing chasms". The pit was said to contain an underground country with its own sun that was "waning". No one could go near it because of a choking stench, but, from a distance, people sometimes saw a "rotating island" above the opening (which they also called a "banging lid". Those whose curiosity got the better of them never returned.

Centuries later, there was an extraordinary concurrence of an earthquake and a thin "fiery whirlwind" topped by a dazzling fireball. With a trail of fire and a "succession of thunderclaps", this sphere flew beyond the horizon where it exploded. The Yakut nomads reasoned that the "demon" must have been a protector as it did them no harm, only destroying the lands of a hostile neighbouring tribe. A few decades later, the same events recurred, so they called their "demon" *Niurgun Bootur*, "the fiery champion". Later still, he failed them terribly as a gigantic fireball emerged from the pit over the sunken tower and exploded overhead, affecting the land for 1,000km (620 miles) around. Quakes shook the ground and cracked the hills, and the centre became a "raging sea of fire" with a disc-like "rotating island" above it. Tribes fled in all directions from the devastation, many of them succumbing to a strange illness that could be inherited.

Six hundred years later, after these events had become legend and people had returned to the area, the great cataclysm happened yet again. *Niurgun Bootur*'s fireball appeared above a fiery whirlwind and again flew off to explode beyond the horizon. After a few decades, another fireball rent the sky; this time it was called *Kiun Erbiie* ("the gleaming aerial herald" or "messenger"). Finally came the devastating explosion that the legends record as *Uot Usumu Tong Duurai*, roughly translated as: "the criminal stranger who pierced the Earth and hid in the depths, destroying all around with a fiery whirlwind".

The epics note that on the eve of the flight of the antihero *Tong Duurai*, the champion *Kiun Erbiie* crossed the firmament as a "falling star" or "dashing lightning" to warn *Niurgun Bootur* of the coming battle. Ambiguously, the legends also speak of *Tong Duurai* bursting forth from the depths to do battle with *Niurgun Bootur* in a melée of fireballs and fiery whirlwinds. Such was the havoc wrought by their battle that the region remained lifeless for a long time afterwards.

The above information is taken from Dr Valery Uvarov's article 'Mysteries of Siberia's Valley of Death' in *Nexus Magazine*, Vol.11, No.1 (Dec 2003–Jan 2004, online at www.nexusmagazine.com/articles/installation1.html) which cites a 1996 account, written in Russian, by Russian ufologist A Gutenev.



ABOVE: An artist's conception of the ancient 'alien' tower.

SUPPLIED BY IVAN MACKERLE

(125 mile) stretch of the river, we split it up into several parts. In each of them we stopped for a few days and, if the overgrown, swampy banks permitted it, set up camps from which we would embark on expeditions.

Launching a parachute in the taiga was no easy feat. Breaking into a sprint while trying not to trip on uneven marshland full of giant roots and hidden holes with 30kg (66lb) on your back required strong legs. We had no previous experience of flying a motor-operated parachute, and for Pavel Štepán, our other pilot, success was a unique athletic achievement.

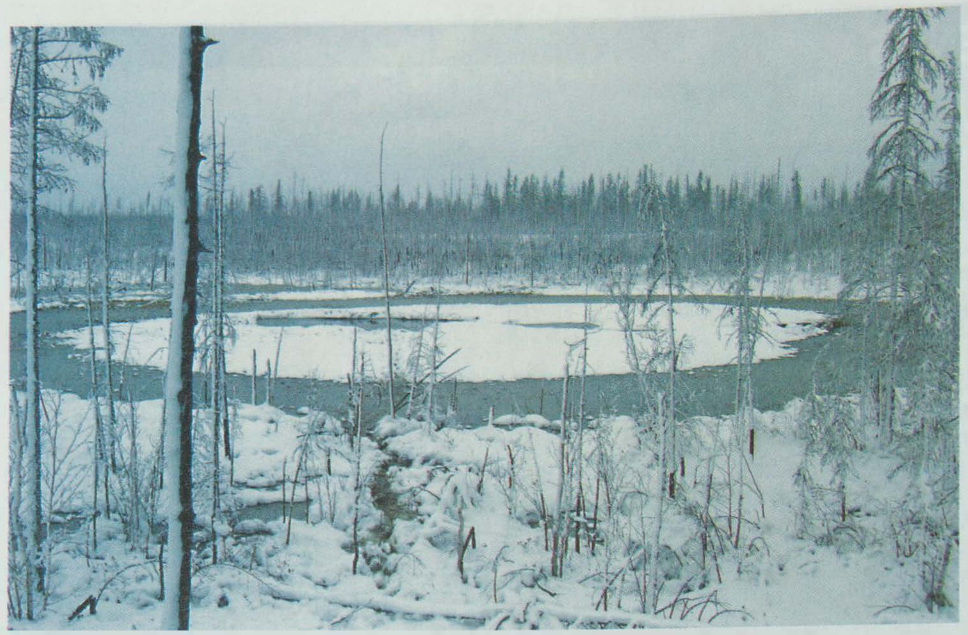
"I found something!" Pavel yelled to us seconds after landing his parachute. "I saw a strange circle," he said, pointing eastwards of the river. We clustered around the camera and replayed the recording. He was right! In the middle of a monotonous landscape was a strange annulus. With the help of a computer, the taiga image and our Google Earth satellite images, we determined the exact coordinates of the strange circle. Overjoyed at the prospect of finding our first 'cauldron', we opened a bottle of vodka.

SUNKEN CAULDRONS

Despite it being June, we were surprised by a night of snowfall. When the snow didn't recede by the second day, we lost patience and set out, searching for the mysterious spot. We climbed up a low hill, GPS in hand, through snowy thickets to a clearing at the top and stopped in surprise. We'd never seen anything like this. It wasn't the long-sought, smooth, protruding hemisphere, but a circular pond about 50m (165ft) in diameter. At its centre was a circular patch of land approximately 30m (100ft) in diameter. It didn't look like a natural formation; it was a ring with an opening at its centre, also flooded with water.

Using two long branches to test the earth below him to make sure it wasn't a treacherous quagmire, Pavel braved the half-frozen water in his fishermen's waders working towards the snowy annulus. Beneath the snow and a thin layer of mud, a pole hit something solid. Was it just ice? Carefully, he continued to the centre of the circle, halting in front of the opening. The almost 3m (10ft)-long pole disappeared beneath the surface. What could he have been standing on? If the hemisphere were made of ice, the current would have melted it. Could it be a giant 'cauldron', by now almost completely submerged in the frozen earth?

The snow melted and we were once again fortunate. A few kilometres downriver, we found a similar spot. In a perfectly circular pond, this time only 10m (33ft) in diameter, was a smooth, solid, gigantic and slightly curved dome, covered in a layer of mud. With the help of a pole, we probed its shape, but unfortunately lacked the equipment to expose it. We would have had to drain the water and remove the mud – and for that we'd need a better equipped and



BOTH PIX: IVAN MACKERLE

ABOVE and BELOW: Was this strange and unnatural-looking formation a submerged cauldron?

funded expedition.

Then, unexpectedly, we were hit by odd health problems which manifested after we spent a night near a sunken 'cauldron'. The next day, I was suddenly overcome by dizziness leading to fainting, a complete loss of balance, choking and chills… just as the old Yakutian legends warned. I couldn't stand, my vision went and I was unable to eat or drink anything. The crisis lasted all day as our tents were buried by another snowstorm. After more frost and a northerly gale, we were all soaked. It was as if the evil demons of the taiga conspired against us trespassers. But, as I was the only one affected, we didn't blame it on some ancient radiation residue. When my condition didn't improve by the following day, we boarded the raft and spent all night and the next day drifting down the river, fleeing the Valley of Death as fast as we could.

A GEOLOGICAL TREASURE TROVE

While we didn't find any proof of the legendary metallic 'cauldrons', we didn't flee quite empty-handed. We had discovered something else, something just as significant – a pocket of titanium ore.

While conducting our aerial search for the 'cauldrons,' we had found yet another peculiar place – a perfectly circular field of rusty brown boulders where the compass needle went wild. A magnetic mountain? Probably. From a geological standpoint, the entire region is peculiar. We trod on sturdy, igneous Siberian peaks which had originated in the Archean Era. In places, the peaks are pierced by vents filled with diamond-bearing mineral deposits. The largest diamond mine lies in the town of Mirnyj, the regional centre from which we had embarked on our mission into the taiga.

When we got back to Prague, we showed a rock sample to a geologist. He confirmed that it was magnetite and ilmenite, an iron and titanium ore. I'm told that we could sell the coordinates of that magnetically anomalous patch to the Russians for a very favourable price. Accounts of our expedition caused quite a stir in the Russian media. It was even said that we were frightened off by the Valley of Death, but the truth is that lack of finance is the real obstacle to returning to hunt for the 'cauldrons'. We've already advised two different exploration teams based in Mirnyj. One of them, led by Andrey Yevteyev, will take along a water pump to drain the central pool and then dig out the rest. The other group, led by Yury Krivoruczko, will probably set out next spring.

We know of unusual geological formations such as iron caps, gossans, lava balls, giant spherical concretions, and geodes. What if the legend-shrouded 'cauldrons' are an unknown geological formation? While the descriptions of interior stairwells, galleries and rooms might have been imagined by superstitious hunters and embellished by fantasists and ufologists, it seems clear that the Siberian taiga conceals great wealth as well as many secrets, including the nature of the 'cauldrons' – a disquieting mystery that still remains unsolved.

A TIMELINE OF YAKUTIAN CAULDRONS

Old Yakutian legends described a series of destructive explosions and fireballs blasting from the earth during a battle between the gods *Niurgun Bootur* and *Tong Duurai*. Smooth, dome-shaped "iron houses" were left in the ruined *taiga* after the battle.

1853 Russian Siberian explorer RK Maak writes in his book *Viliuysky Okrug* (*The Viliuy Region*) that the side of a giant, submerged metal cauldron protrudes from the ground near the Vilyuy tributary, but only the rim is visible and there are trees growing out of it.

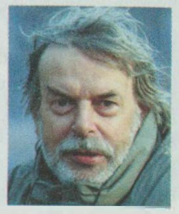
1908 A yet-to-be-explained fiery ball known as the Tunguska meteorite explodes over Siberia. The 'Chulym bolide' follows in 1984, copying the path of the Tunguska meteorite with surprising precision.

1989 ND Arkhipov, a researcher into ancient cultures of Yakutia, writes in his book *Drevnaya Yakutia* (*Ancient Yakutia*) that among the population of the Viliuy basin there is a legend from ancient times about the existence of bronze cauldrons (*olguis*) in the upper reaches of that river .

1996 A small Russian ufology magazine publishes an article by A Gutenev (who lived in Mirnyj) about the mystery of the 'cauldrons' and the Valley of Death, which he attributed to extraterrestrials.

2004 Dr Valerij Uvarov publishes on the Internet a translated and expanded version of Gutenev's article, making the mystery known to the rest of the world.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



For over 30 years, **IVAN MACKERLE** has led expeditions to remote parts of the world seeking monsters and other fortean mysteries, some of which he has reported in *FT*. Next in his sights are pterodactyls in Papua New Guinea, and the legendary land of Agharta in the Himalayas.

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THE MAKING OF ALTERNATIVE 3

Sci-fi spoof *Alternative 3* is widely regarded as television's equivalent of the Orson Welles radio play *War of the Worlds*. *A3* has been much discussed over the last 30 years, but the makers of the film have been conspicuously absent from the debate. Now, for the first time, director Christopher Miles breaks his silence and talks to **STEVE MARSHALL** in an exclusive interview for *Fortean Times*.
All pictures from Christopher Miles's collection.

The year 1977 was hardly the best of times in Great Britain: the nation's morale was low and things appeared to be getting steadily worse. With 'Sunny Jim' Callaghan as Prime Minister, inflation was crippling the economy and even the firemen were poised to strike. The Sex Pistols were trying to sabotage the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations, and when the Eurovision Song Contest was held in London it was won by France. It was a *very* worrying time.

On the evening of 20 June 1977, several million British television viewers tuned in to ITV's "Science Report" and their fears were confirmed: things really *were* getting worse. A lot worse, in fact.

The programme revealed how a trail of murder and intrigue had led to the discovery of a covert plan to evacuate the doomed Earth and colonise Mars. Not everyone would be going – just a carefully selected elite. The rest of the population would be left behind to die, as accelerating climate change made the Earth uninhabitable. And this plan had already been in operation for years! The 'brain drain' scientists leaving Britain in droves were not going to work in the USA, as generally believed, but on *Mars*. Many, in fact, were there already. An 'ex-astronaut' told how NASA's Moon programme had been a sham: it existed merely as a cover-up for their *true* purpose of creating a Moon-based launching pad for trips to Mars. Furthermore, America and Russia were in cahoots; they had already secretly altered the atmosphere of Mars to make it habitable. What was more, when they had first landed there, back in 1962, they had discovered life and *filmed* it!

The programme was, of course, a hoax (see FT64:47–49). Three decades years later, it's difficult to imagine how anyone could possibly have believed any of this – but many viewers *did* believe it.

Made by Anglia Television, *Alternative 3* had been hyped with trailers before the screening, ensuring a healthy audience on the night. Shown in what was an established weekly drama slot, the hour-long programme purported to be a serious investigation by "Science Report", an entirely invented strand that had an air of authenticity. Presenter Tim Brinton was well known as an ex-newsreader, familiar from many current-affairs programmes. For many viewers that night, there was no reason to believe that *Alternative 3* was *not* true.

The day after the broadcast saw a storm of protest from the British press. Journalists who'd attended a press screening before transmission had quickly realised that the programme was a hoax, but had gamely played along with it. TV critics do at least read the end credits; those at the end of *Alternative 3* listed all the characters in the film alongside their real names, making it quite plain that they were actors. And there too, in very large letters, was the date of the film: 1 April 1977. *Alternative 3* had originally been planned as an April Fool joke, but industrial action delayed it until June.

Not surprisingly, the press had a field day. The *Daily Express*, which led with the story, claimed that thousands of irate viewers had "protested in shock and horror", jamming both their own switchboard and ITV's. Accusations of "irresponsible broadcasting" were rebuffed by ITV and Anglia, who had announced that the programme was a hoax only an hour after it was transmitted. The press reaction rumbled on for several weeks, and *Alternative 3* was never shown on British TV again.

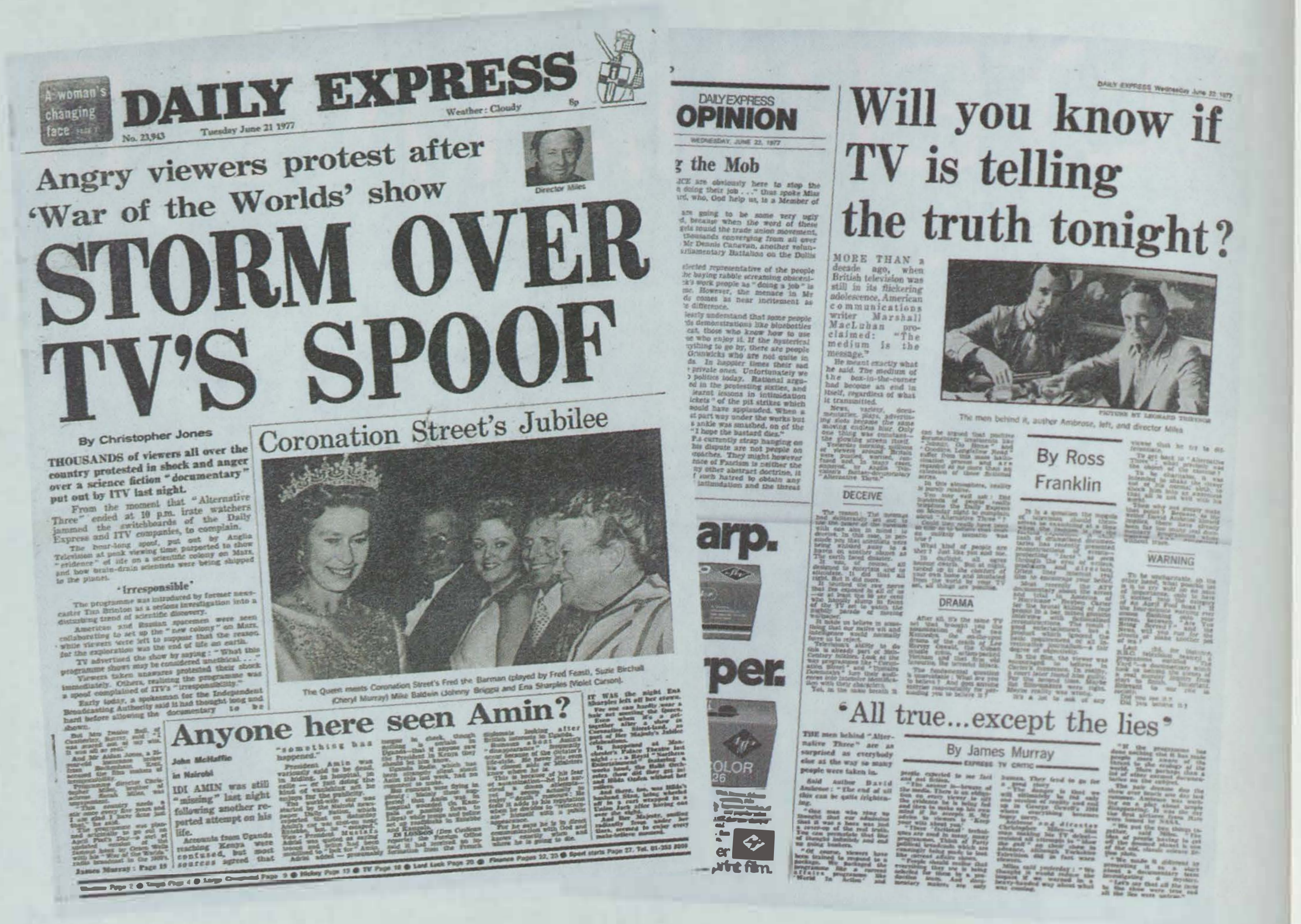
"A REALLY SUPER BROADCAST"

So who was actually to blame for this outrage? The culprits were quickly identified as writer David Ambrose and director Christopher Miles. Both remained gloatingly unrepentant, with the triumphant Miles announcing: "This country needs a stir once every five years and I'm glad I've done just that."

The pair went on to enjoy long and successful careers in the film industry. Ambrose is now a thriller writer, best known for his Charlie Monk novels; Christopher Miles (brother of actress Sarah Miles) continues to write and direct films from his Wiltshire hideaway. It was there that I tracked him down, as he put the finishing touches to *Alternative 3*'s long-awaited DVD release.

Had he and David Ambrose expected such a dramatic reaction to their film back in 1977?

"No, it was a total surprise! Obviously, we were aware of what had happened when Orson Welles had done *War of the Worlds* on radio, but that had been 40 years earlier. We'd assumed that audiences would now be sophisticated enough to realise our film was a hoax – that's why I went to so much trouble to make it look convincing. I was at home on the night of the broadcast, when the *Daily Express* rang.



A woman's changing face

DAILY EXPRESS

No. 23,943 Tuesday June 21 1977 Weather: Cloudy 8p

Angry viewers protest after 'War of the Worlds' show

Director Miles

STORM OVER TV'S SPOOF

By Christopher Jones

THOUSANDS of viewers all over the country protested in shock and anger over a science fiction "documentary" put out by ITV last night.

From the moment that "Alternative Three" ended at 10 p.m. irate watchers jammed the switchboards of the Daily Express and ITV companies, to complain.

The hour-long spoof, put out by Anglia Television at peak viewing time, purported to show "evidence" of life on a scientific colony on Mars, and how brain-drain scientists were being shipped to the planet.

'Irresponsible'

Coronation Street's Jubilee

Anyone here seen Amin?

DAILY EXPRESS OPINION

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 1977

DAILY EXPRESS Wednesday June 22 1977

Will you know if TV is telling the truth tonight?

MORE THAN a decade ago, when British television was still in its flickering adolescence, American communications writer Marshall MacLuhan proclaimed: "The medium is the message."

He meant exactly what he said. The medium of the box-in-the-corner had become an end in itself, regardless of what it transmitted.

The men behind it, author Ambrose, left, and director Miles

By Ross Franklin

DECEIVE

DRAMA

WARNING

'All true...except the lies'

By James Murray

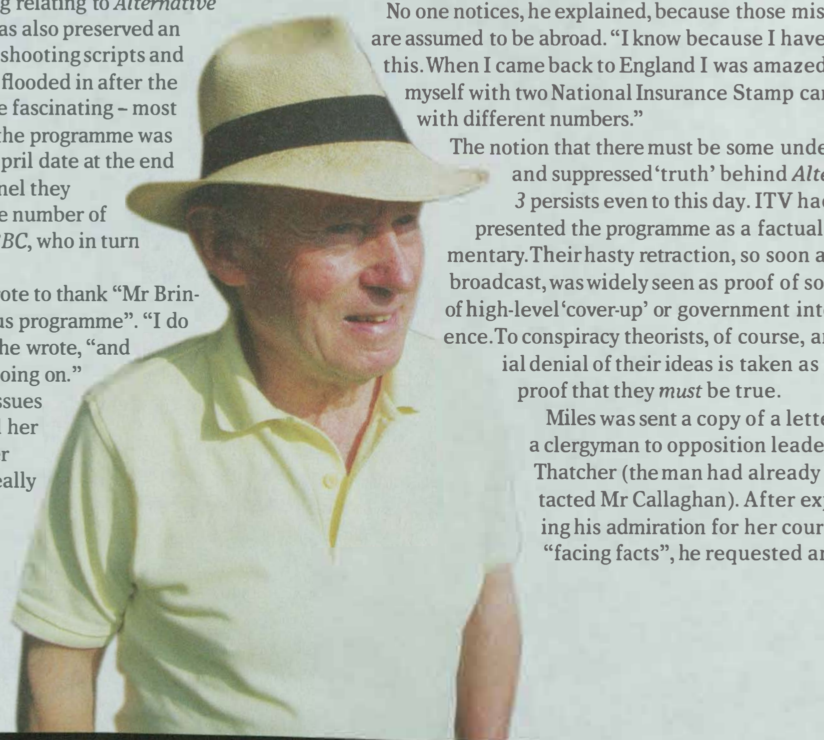
EXPRESS TV CRITIC

ABOVE: The broacast of *Alternative 3* caused a furore in the British press, to the delight of unrepentant director Christopher Miles (pictured below).

It was only then that I realised what was going on with all the phone calls and protests. I remember there was a radio phone-in that went on the rest of that night, with dozens of people ringing in to talk about *Alternative 3*. What really amazed me was that, firstly, so many people had been fooled into thinking it was real; and secondly, that no one seemed to have bothered reading the end titles that confirmed it was a hoax. It became clear to me that many people see what they *want* to see, not what's in front of their eyes: many viewers thought they had seen flying saucers in the film – and there were *none*."

Fortunately, Miles is an inveterate hoarder. His personal 16mm print of the film turned out to be the only copy in existence, as Anglia Television had lost everything relating to *Alternative 3* – even the original contracts. He has also preserved an archive of production stills, original shooting scripts and some of the hundreds of letters that flooded in after the broadcast. The 30-year-old letters are fascinating – most of them from viewers who believed the programme was genuine. Some who'd missed the 1 April date at the end had also failed to notice which channel they were watching. Consequently, a large number of letters were sent by mistake to the *BBC*, who in turn passed them on to Anglia.

A terribly nice lady from Essex wrote to thank "Mr Brinton and Team" for a "truly marvellous programme". "I do not find it the least bit horrifying," she wrote, "and would like to know more of what is going on." She went on to discuss some of the issues raised in the programme and related her family's UFO experiences; then, after offering her congratulations on a "really super broadcast", she'd posted the letter off to BBC2.



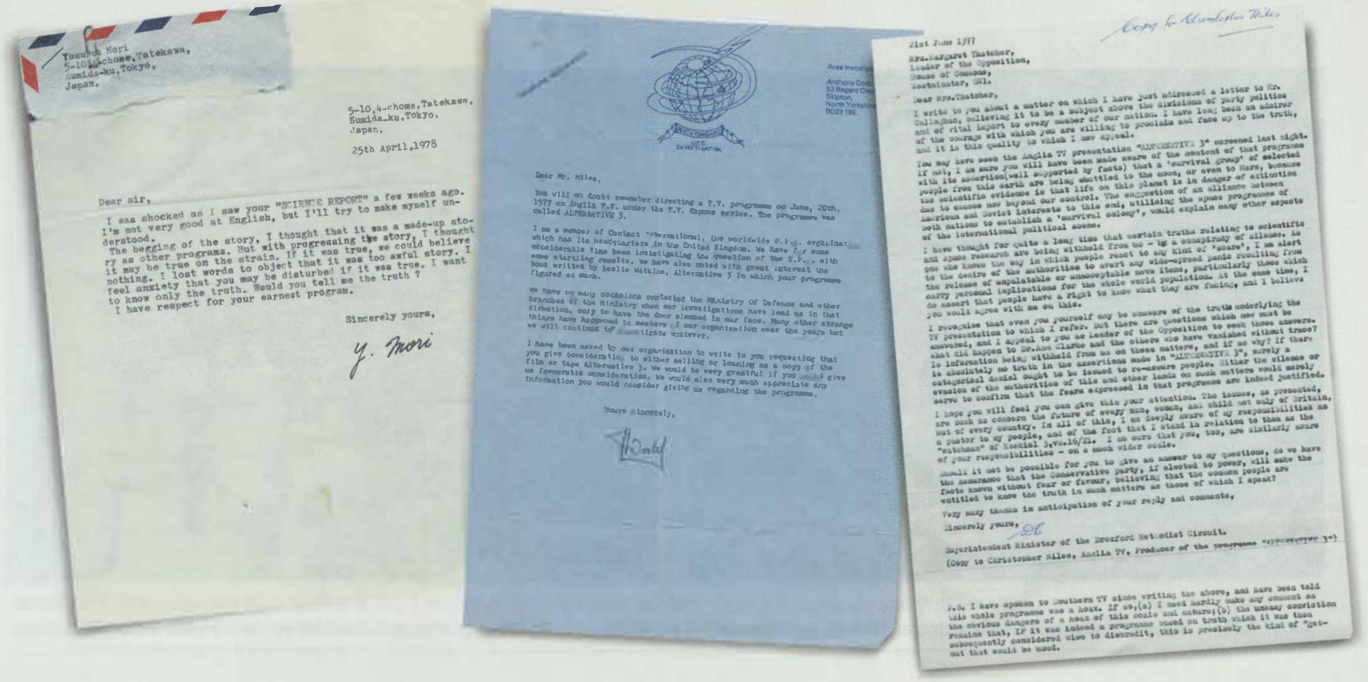
Letters came from groups of UFO investigators wanting to borrow the film to show their members; others from individuals wanting to arrange a personal meeting so they could discuss the programme further, "perhaps over a meal?" Such requests were graciously declined, but every letter was answered.

One gentleman describing himself as the "President of the Hampstead HG Wells Society" (while stressing that he was "by no means a crank") related how, during a time when he was busily writing a new philosophy for mankind, he was repeatedly asked questions by strange men in the street. They watched him in Victoria Station and were *all dressed the same*. He went on: "It is my theory that people disappear every year without trace."

No one notices, he explained, because those missing are assumed to be abroad. "I know because I have done this. When I came back to England I was amazed to find myself with two National Insurance Stamp cards, both with different numbers."

The notion that there must be some underlying and suppressed 'truth' behind *Alternative 3* persists even to this day. ITV had first presented the programme as a factual documentary. Their hasty retraction, so soon after the broadcast, was widely seen as proof of some sort of high-level 'cover-up' or government interference. To conspiracy theorists, of course, any official denial of their ideas is taken as positive proof that they *must* be true.

Miles was sent a copy of a letter from a clergyman to opposition leader Mrs Thatcher (the man had already contacted Mr Callaghan). After expressing his admiration for her courage in "facing facts", he requested an assurance that the Conservatives, when back in power, would be properly informing the public about issues raised in *Alternative 3*. The typed letter is quite long, occupying a whole page of foolscap; an extra strip of paper has then been carefully pasted onto the bottom. It reads: "PS. I have spoken to Southern TV since writing the above, and have been told that this whole programme was a hoax. If so, (a) I hardly need make any comment on the obvious dangers of a hoax of this scale and nature; (b) the uneasy conviction remains that, *if* it were indeed a programme based on truth which it was then subsequently considered wise to discredit, this is precisely the kind of "get-out" that would be used."



Yasu[illegible] Mori
5-10,4-chome,Tatekawa,
Sumida-ku,Tokyo,
Japan.

5-10,4-chome,Tatekawa,
Sumida-ku,Tokyo,
Japan.

25th April,1978

Dear sir,

I was shocked as I saw your "SCIENCE REPORT" a few weeks ago. I'm not very good at English, but I'll try to make myself understood.

The begging of the story, I thought that it was a made-up story as other programs. But with progressing the story, I thought it may be true on the strain. If it was true, we could believe nothing. I lost words to object that it was too awful story. I feel anxiety that you may be disturbed if it was true. I want to know only the truth. Would you tell me the truth ?

I have respect for your earnest program.

Sincerely yours,

Y. Mori

NORTH YORKSHIRE UFO INVESTIGATION

Area Investig
Anthony Dodd
53 Regent Cre
Skipton,
North Yorkshire
BD23 1BE

Dear Mr. Miles,

You will no doubt remember directing a T.V. programme on June, 20th. 1977 on Anglia T.V. under the T.V. [illegible] series. The programme was called ALTERNATIVE 3.

I am a member of Contact International, the worldwide U.F.O. organisat which has its headquarters in the United Kingdom. We have for some considerable time been investigating the question of the U.F.O., with some startling results, we have also noted with great interest the book written by Leslie Watkins, Alternative 3 in which your programme figured so much.

We have on many occasions contacted the Ministry Of Defence and other branches of the Ministry when our investigations have lead us in that direction, only to have the door slammed in our face. Many other strange things have happened to members of our organisation over the years but we will continue to investigate whatever.

I have been asked by our organisation to write to you requesting that you give consideration to either selling or loaning us a copy of the film or tape Alternative 3. We would be very greatful if you could give us favourable consideration. We would also very much appreciate any information you would consider giving us regarding the programme.

Yours sincerely,

Copy for Christopher Miles

21st June 1977

Mrs.Margaret Thatcher,
Leader of the Opposition,
House of Commons,
Westminster, SW1.

Dear Mrs.Thatcher,

I write to you about a matter on which I have just addressed a letter to Mr. Callaghan, believing it to be a subject above the divisions of party politics and of vital import to every member of our nation. I have long been an admirer of the courage with which you are willing to proclaim and face up to the truth, and it is this quality to which I now appeal.

You may have seen the Anglia TV presentation "ALTERNATIVE 3" screened last night. If not, I am sure you will have been made aware of the content of that programme with its assertion(well supported by facts) that a 'survival group' of selected people from this earth are being shuttled to the moon, or even to Mars, because the scientific evidence is that life on this planet is in danger of extinction due to causes now beyond our control. The suggestion of an alliance between American and Soviet interests to this end, utilising the space programmes of both nations to establish a 'survival colony', would explain many other aspects of the international political scene.

I have thought for quite a long time that certain truths relating to scientific and space research are being withheld from us - by a conspiracy of silence. As one who knows the way in which people react to any kind of 'scare', I am alert to the desire of the authorities to avert any wide-spread panic resulting from the release of unpalatable or unacceptable news items, particularly those which carry personal implications for the whole world population. At the same time, I do assert that people have a right to know what they are facing, and I believe you would agree with me on this.

I recognise that even you yourself may be unaware of the truth underlying the TV presentation to which I refer. But there are questions which now must be answered, and I appeal to you as Leader of the Opposition to seek those answers. What did happen to Dr.Ann Clarke and the others who have vanished without trace? Is information being withheld from us on these matters, and if so why? If there is absolutely no truth in the assertions made in "ALTERNATIVE 3", surely a categorical denial ought to be issued to re-assure people. Either the silence or evasion of the authorities of this and other lands on such matters would merely serve to confirm that the fears expressed in that programme are indeed justified.

I hope you will feel you can give this your attention. The issues, as presented, are such as concern the future of every man, woman, and child not only of Britain, but of every country. In all of this, I am deeply aware of my responsibilities as a pastor to my people, and of the fact that I stand in relation to them as the "watchman" of Ezekiel 3,vs.16/21. I am sure that you, too, are similarly aware of your responsibilities - on a much wider scale.

Should it not be possible for you to give an answer to my questions, do we have the assurance that the Conservative party, if elected to power, will make the facts known without fear or favour, believing that the common people are entitled to know the truth in such matters as those of which I speak?

Very many thanks in anticipation of your reply and comments,

Sincerely yours,

Superintendent Minister of the Droxford Methodist Circuit.
(Copy to Christopher Miles, Anglia TV, Producer of the programme "ALTERNATIVE 3")

P.S. I have spoken to Southern TV since writing the above, and have been told this whole programme was a hoax. If so,(a) I need hardly make any comment on the obvious dangers of a hoax of this scale and nature;(b) the uneasy conviction remains that, IF it was indeed a programme based on truth which it was then subsequently considered wise to discredit, this is precisely the kind of "get-out that would be used.

ABOVE: Public confusion over *Alternative 3*'s status as fact or fiction gave rise to some interesting, and sometimes odd, correspondence from viewers.

FAKING IT

March 1978 saw the release of a book version of *Alternative 3* written by Leslie Watkins at the request of Sphere Books (**FT121:28–31**). Sharing the credit with Ambrose and Miles, Watkins did a fair job of expanding the one hour script into a book which sold over 30,000 copies in the first six months. Translated into many different languages, it sold all around the world – as did the film.

"It was shown everywhere," relates Miles. "In Canada, it was on seven times, by public request. Japan too, showed it often. Anglia had made some sales even before the film was finished. I didn't benefit of course – I'd done a deal where I only got a percentage from America, and it was *banned* there."

Letters came from UFO groups wanting to borrow the film to show their members

Alternative 3 is still banned in the USA. However, this is not, as has been alleged, because of the secrets it reveals. There is a US law making it illegal for broadcasters to disguise fiction as fact – specifically banned is the use of the "we interrupt this broadcast…" device – which was introduced as a response to the alleged panic provoked by Orson Welles's 1938 *War of the Worlds* (see **FT120:40–43; 199:42–47**).

I asked if there was any truth in the story that *Alternative 3* was written over lunch.

"Absolutely, yes!" chortles Miles. "The basic idea was, anyway. David and I met to discuss a script he was working on, about miss-

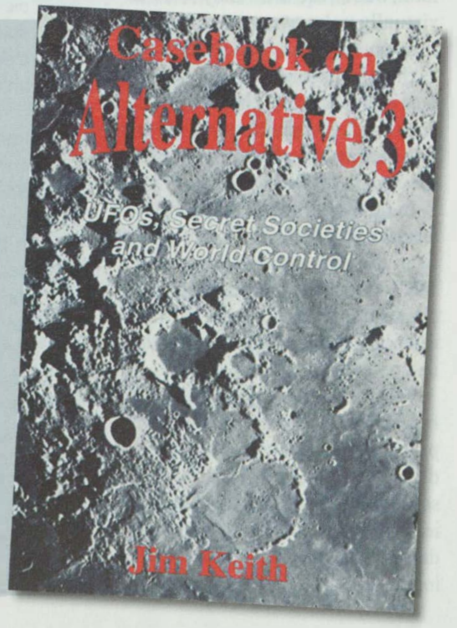
JIM KEITH AND *ALTERNATIVE 3*

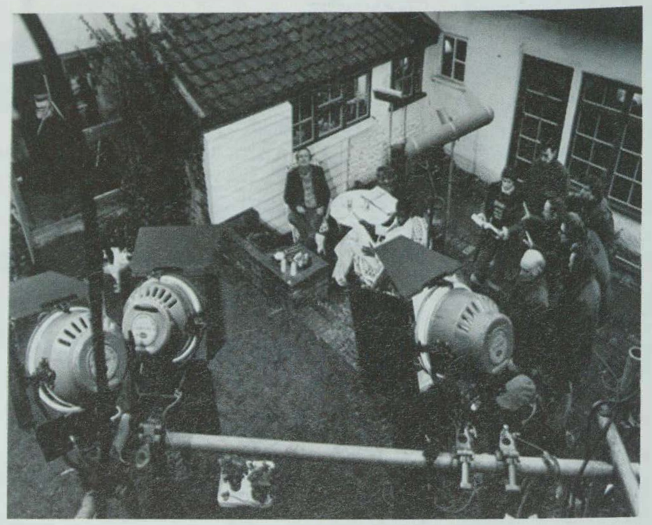
It seems surprising how often *Alternative 3* crops up in Google searches of conspiracy themes. Surprising, that is, until you read Jim Keith's *Casebook on Alternative 3 – UFOs, Secret Societies and World Control*. The book is breathtaking in its scope: there's scarcely been a conspiracy in history that is not somehow connected to *Alternative 3*. Keith died accidentally (?) after falling off a stage at the Burning Man Festival in 1999 (**FT178:76–79**), and if he really was bumped off, as has been alleged, it could have been by absolutely anyone: they're all in his books!

In this 1994 book from IllumiNet Press, Jim applies his 'Grand Unified Conspiracy Theory' to *Alternative 3*. Starting with a detailed examination of the film, he exposes it as a crude and obvious hoax – and then goes on to declare that it's all accidentally true! The third chapter runs to only a dozen pages, yet crammed into them you'll find: Global Conspiracy; the Nazis, the CIA; the Freemasons and their control of both World Wars; the Illuminati; Madame Blavatsky; Cecil Rhodes; the Golden Dawn; the New World Order; the Round Table Group; the Rothschilds… and so it goes on.

Nazi Death-Rays; Crop Circles; Jack the Ripper; OSS-CIA sex and chaos-magic rituals…

Awesome.





ABOVE LEFT: A chilly bungalow outside Norwich stands in for America. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Director Christopher Miles with the principal cast of *Alternative 3*.

ing people, and it just wasn't going anywhere. David's French wife turned up holding the latest copy of *Paris Match* and there on the cover was the first photo from the surface of Mars, taken by the *Viking* probe. I said: "So what if all those missing people were actually going to *Mars*?" Then all the other elements just fell into place… It took a couple of hours. Anglia turned the film down at first. The decision was overturned by John Woolf, an old film man. He was proved right: the film made a lot of money for Anglia.'

And the locations?

"We shot most of the film around Norfolk, as Anglia Television was based in Norwich. We filmed throughout January, which was absolutely freezing, and had to make it look like summer. One key character is 'Bob Grodin', the ex-astronaut who's since become an alcoholic wreck. He was played by Shane Rimmer, a wonderful actor who had been in *Doctor Strangelove* but didn't become well known until later. His scenes were supposed to have been shot in America, but it was actually a bungalow on the outskirts of Norwich, that we'd modified with screen doors and a barbecue. Grodin's American girlfriend was played by the reigning Miss Norfolk. We couldn't dare let her speak…

"I had wanted to use ordinary people in the film, but was forced to use Equity members. I think they all did a pretty good job in the end – actors find it difficult to do 'ordinary'. Some did become famous later, but at the time they were all virtually unknown except for Tim Brinton, who was, I think, perfect as the presenter. He had a familiar face and a gravitas that lent authenticity to the whole thing. Rather like Richard Dimbleby, when he did the *Spaghetti Harvest*."

In fact, *Alternative 3*'s original air-date of 1 April 1977 would have been the 20th anniversary of the BBC's famous hoax. Although he claims not to have known this, Miles readily acknowledges *Spaghetti Harvest* as an inspiration.

"I actually interviewed Dimbleby's son Jonathan for the role of presenter; but quite honestly, I didn't think he had his father's sense of humour. He didn't like the idea anyway, and thought it might damage his career. Then I auditioned that man Jeffrey Archer. He was broke at the time and was up for anything. We shared the same agent, who persuaded me to give him a tryout. And he was *AWFUL!*"

"The creature moving below the surface of Mars is actually my fingers wiggling…"

Many have noted that the film *Capricorn One* – in which Apollo astronauts are not sent to the Moon but removed from the capsule and delivered to a film studio where the landings are faked – was made the following year. Did Miles believe the film's premise was poached from *Alternative 3*?

"No, I didn't personally; meeting the producer of *Capricorn One* convinced me that it was just a coincidence. Remember, the 'faked Moon landing' stories had been in circulation for years – since the late Sixties, I believe. We also used that thing about the Russians: that they'd started the space race and then given up… *or had they?*

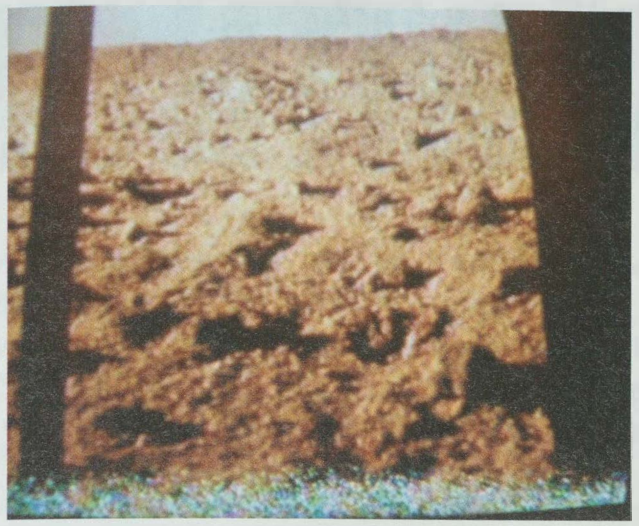
Our film drew on several themes that were current at that time, which is why I think it touched a collective nerve. As well as the 'brain drain' there'd been a great deal of discussion in the press that year about us heading for a new Ice Age: we were certainly having chaotic weather. In '76, we'd had that terribly hot summer and a drought – then it snowed in Miami, for the first time ever. We'd also had earthquakes all around the world. I think people were starting to get worried about climate change for the first time and the film played on those fears."

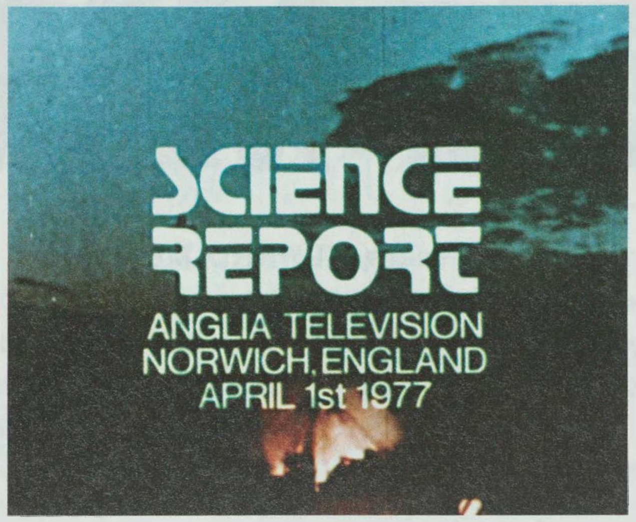
THE VRILLON INCIDENT

Alternative 3 was not the only sci-fi hoax of 1977. At 5.10 pm on Saturday 26 November, the ITN news was taken over for six minutes by a being named 'Vrillon' who claimed to be a representative of the 'Ashtar Galactic Command' (**FT24:50–51**). The TV picture wasn't affected, just the sound. Vrillon's speech (which was rather tastefully treated with electronic effects) can be found on the Internet as an mp3 and a transcript. While no one has ever come forward to claim responsibility for this rogue transmission, most people have concluded that it was indeed a hoax achieved by taking over the Southern Television transmitter at Hannington, Hampshire.

Despite his impressive, military-sounding title, Vrillon comes across as a typical space brother of the familiar contactee type and a bit of a hippie. He warns of impending environmental catastrophe, as our planet moves into "the New Age of Aquarius", urging mankind to give up their "weapons of evil" as the time of conflict is past. Dismissing money as "worthless dross", he hints that we unwittingly share our planet with other beings.

After signing off with the snappy "May you be blessed by the supreme love and truth of the cosmos", he was never heard of again.





ABOVE LEFT: The supposed Mars landing of May 1962, showing a "creature" tunnelling just below the surface (actually Miles wiggling his fingers).
ABOVE RIGHT: The date shown on the final credits (the original planned broadcast date) should perhaps have given the game away to observant viewers.

LIFE ON MARS

Miles is particularly proud of the film's climax: video evidence of life on Mars, allegedly shot during a secret unmanned landing in 1962.

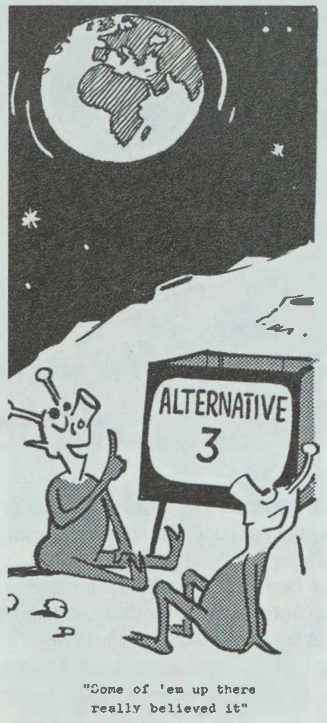
"I had to watch through literally thousands of feet of film, looking for a suitable Martian creature. Anglia had a huge wildlife library and when I'd gone through that, I started looking at what we could buy in. Much of it was of sea creatures, and though it was good, nothing was quite right. Then Anglia started griping about what it would cost, so I did it myself."

The sequence starts with a surprisingly convincing aerial shot, allegedly filmed from the Martian Lander on its descent; it was actually a stock helicopter shot of the Red Desert in Ethiopia. Through bursts of static, we see the surface of Mars looming closer as the craft lands. Suddenly, the sand begins to move, as if some creature is tunnelling just below the surface. An excited voice on the tape announces:

"*22nd of May 1962 – We're on the planet Mars, and we have life!*"

So how were the special effects achieved?

"I just made a 'Martian surface' of damp sand and buried my forearm in it," laughs Miles. "The mysterious creature moving below the surface of Mars is actually my fingers, wiggling up through the sand! We transferred the film to video; masked out part of the monitor to look like a spaceship window, and re-filmed it – manually interfering with the video player to make the picture roll and flicker. Remember, there were no computer effects in those days."


ALTERNATIVE 3
"Some of 'em up there really believed it"

A contemporary cartoon by Jon.

This sequence was being used as late as 1990 in lectures by leading Scientologist 'Captain' Bill Robertson (once second in command to L Ron Hubbard himself). In a transcript, he analyses the 'Martian Landing' film, deducing that this can be no American or Russian spaceship, as the windows are the wrong shape, and don't have rivets! Robertson can also make out features on the Martian surface that just look like sand to us ordinary humans (Captain Bill did claim to be from another galaxy). He can see a control tower and three circular landing pads, each over 100ft (30m) across. Carefully weighing up all the evidence before him, the Captain concludes that in this film is the definitive proof that the Americans did *not* send a spaceship to Mars: *they got a lift there in a flying saucer*. "That," he affirms, "was the big secret of *Alternative 3*".

And finally, what does Miles think of the persistent claims that his hoax accidentally exposed a *real* conspiracy?

"We did get strange phone calls and letters to that effect, but I think they were just from people hoaxing *us*. Someone phoned Anglia TV, claiming to be from an old people's home where one of the residents had died of shock after watching our programme. Anglia traced the call but it just turned out to be a public library somewhere…

"There was just one very strange episode that I still can't explain. In 1982, I was asked by the British Council to show my print of *Alternative 3* at a Greek sci-fi film festival being held in Delphi. I duly turned up with a chap from the British Council, both of us smartly dressed for the occasion, which we'd assumed would be something like *BAFTA*. We were greeted by the organiser – a scruffy, fat man who wore a T-shirt saying 'FUCK ME' in large letters. He informed us that a porn film festival had just finished, and the sci-fi one would be starting next. There was no publicity and the 'cinema' was just a school building with an ancient projector that damaged my film.

"But the peculiar thing was that just before my film started, three mysterious black limousines pulled up: they'd driven out from Athens. Six passengers got out, two men from each car, and all wore black suits. They came in and watched the film; then, without speaking to anyone, they left together in silence. It was all very strange – but I suppose they could have been film critics…"

The long-unseen and newly-restored *Alternative 3* looks surprisingly good after 30 years. Quaintly dated by its clipped English accents, and the fact that everyone in it seems to smoke, it's still a very entertaining film. Some of the issues raised in 1977 were, in fact, very prescient: the Space Shuttle, central to the plot, was then only being tested and didn't fly properly until 1981; water was not found on Mars until 2005; and who, in the Seventies, could possibly have predicted that climate change would become the hot topic of the 21st century?

As one reviewer put it: "*It's all true… except the lies.*" FT

Christopher Miles has recently restored the one surviving print of *Alternative 3*, which is now available on DVD with additional material from Soda Pictures (www.sodapictures.com). Turn to p67 for your chance to win a copy.

Author Biography

STEVE MARSHALL is currently writing about acoustics for a new title in the *Wooden Books* series. Also a musician, he was once a composer in the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop and now specialises in surround sound.
See www.stevemarshall.org.uk.

THE MAN WITH THE SHRUNKEN HEAD

For nearly 30 years, **EDWARD MEYER** has had what must be one of the world's more interesting jobs: since 1978, he has worked for Ripley's Entertainment, and currently holds the position of Vice President of Exhibits and Archives. His most recent project is the new book *Search for the Shrunken Heads and Other Curiosities*. On a recent trip to London, he stopped by the *Fortean Times* offices to talk to **DAVID SUTTON**, answer the *FT* team's questions and show off his shrunken head.

"Bulum Baluba" from Ripley
Suva, Fiji Islands

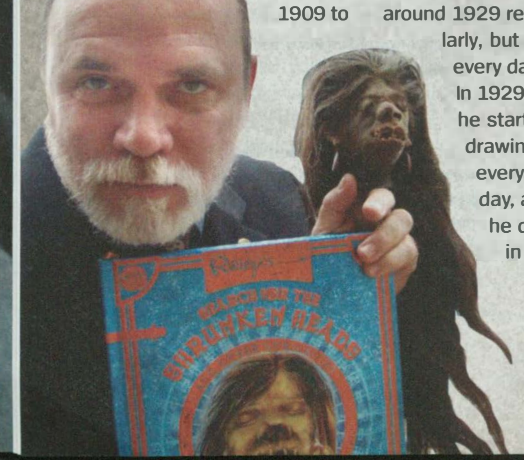
COURTESY OF RIPLEY'S

FORTEAN TIMES: So, how did you end up working for Ripley's, and what exactly do you do?

EDWARD MEYER: I graduated from the University of Toronto as a Library Science student and was hired by Ripley's to catalogue the 'Believe It Or Not!' (BION!) cartoons. I am still the editor of the cartoon; after 30 years I still read the panel every day, and that's a big part of my life. Approximately five years into my career, being in the right place at the right time – I always say I know a little about everything and a lot about nothing – I found myself in the position of being the guy who acquires the Ripley's museum exhibits. Since then, I've acquired over 20,000 pieces. I travel a fair bit; I'm the editor of our book programme; I do a lot of research, film and TV production; and I'm the historian or, as the Boss describes me, I'm the guy who knows who Mr Ripley was. Given that he died in 1949, most of our younger audience don't know who he was. I get letters addressed to me as 'Dear Mr Ripley'.

FT: Perhaps you could tell us a bit about Robert Ripley - how did a global phenomenon start with one guy drawing cartoons?

EM: Yes, one guy drawing cartoons… but he was a showman in the PT Barnum tradition. Now, obviously, a guy that likes to be known to the public, likes to see his name in print and his picture in the paper. But, fundamentally, his talent was as a cartoonist, and he was a very good one. He rose to the top because his art was good. His very first published drawing dates from 1908, and his first full-time job was in 1909. He drew from 1909 to around 1929 regularly, but not every day. In 1929, he started drawing every day, and he died in 1949. So, 20 times 365 days, times four or five drawings per panel – it adds up to a lot of artwork.



He was born in 1893 in California, and worked in San Francisco for three and a half years, but his career starts really in New York City – his is very much a New York story. He came to New York wanting to play baseball – art was the hobby, baseball was the career. He had a try-out with the NY Giants and broke his arm in Spring training; maybe he could have gone on to play baseball, but he made the decision to make a living as an artist, starting as a sports cartoonist, because that was what he had known up to that time.

In 1924, he took his first trip around the world, and published his findings as a diary, a daily journal in the *New York Daily Post*. Based on the success of those journals, he put them into book form, and the book got the attention of William Randolph Hearst, who famously said: "Hire Ripley!" So, in July of 1929 Ripley becomes a paid employee of King Features, and it's really at that point (which is where our archive starts) that Ripley's 'Believe it or Not!' takes form. It's no longer just one man – he's got secretaries, translators and people making sure he gets his art done on time.

In the 1930s, we find Ripley travelling all over the world, all the time. He's more popular than the President – he's an international figure, recognised on the streets of South Africa or Moscow. But it's important to remember that he's travelling in luxury. It's a bit of a myth to think of this guy as Indiana Jones – he's travelling on the best ocean liners, with an entourage that takes care of everything he does; if he's meeting the Jivaro Indians in Ecuador, it's pre-arranged – he's not out there in a dug-out canoe finding them! He's not an explorer, despite the safari helmet!

He also gets involved in radio, in Broadway, in the lecture circuit; he does 15-minute movies. He's a celebrity by any measure you'd care to use.

In the 1940s, he's just as popular, but it's a much more domestic popularity. World War II put a stop to some of his activities, and he bought himself a big, fancy house, threw big, elaborate parties in New York City and spent his nights on the town. He was drinking too much and no longer playing any sports, so his physical condition deteriorated very quickly. If you look at the photos, you can see this once fit young man ageing yearly and looking older than he really was. He was only 55 when he died in 1949.

FT: How do you account for Ripley's amazing popularity through the 1930s and '40s? Is it that he pitched this material at just the right level to communicate with a broad audience?

EM: Absolutely! I think he wanted to provide 'edutainment'. He wanted to be an educator, but didn't have the education himself. So this was his way of being a scholar, of disseminating knowledge to the masses – without either he or the masses having a college education. He gave them the opportunity to learn things they otherwise wouldn't have. They'll never get the chance or be able to afford to go to New Guinea, so he goes there and then brings them back a fact about the place, so they at least know *something* about it.

Plus, they get their 15 minutes of fame – you know, he puts into the column 'Submitted by Edward Meyer'. Your name goes alongside the cartoon, and into a newspaper that 80 million people are reading every day in 42 countries and 17 languages. So, the little guy on the farm in Nebraska has his moment in the spotlight, knowing that someone in Moscow is reading about his three-legged duck!

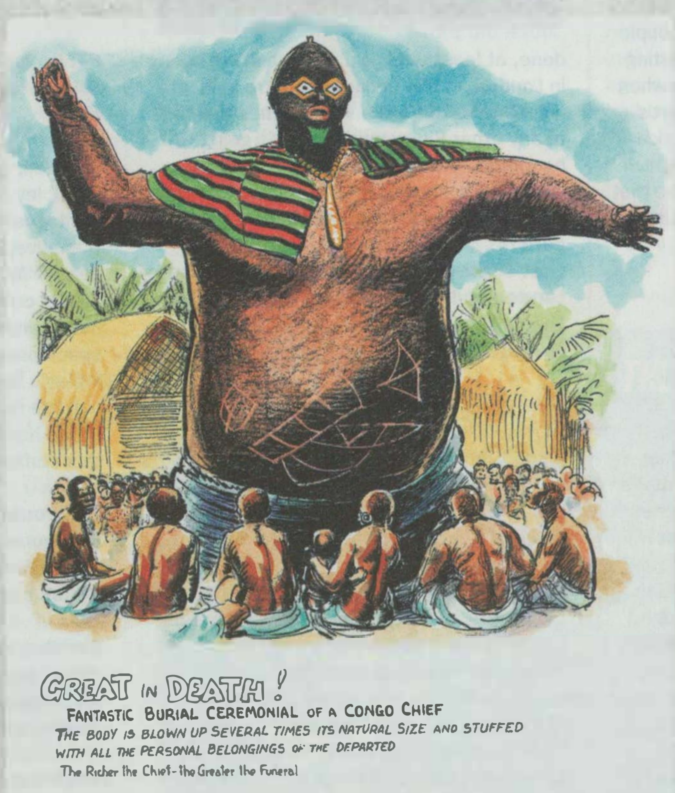
FT: It's similar to the way that *FT* relies on its network of clipsters around the world…

EM: It's still fundamental to our operation. We still – particularly through our website – encourage people to submit their BION!s. There's a guy called Chester Tumidajewicz who's been writing to us for 30 years, and sends us a letter every single week, typically with 50–60 submissions. All this guy does is read 10 newspapers a day, clip stories, throw them in an envelope and send them to me! He's one of several like that, hardcore Ripley fanatics – some write to us every single day.

Wayne Harbour was one of the classics – one of the most fascinating characters I could ever imagine. He worked in a small town post office and started writing to Ripley in 1943. He wrote a letter every single day for about 30 years. He chose one of the stories in the daily cartoon and wrote to whoever submitted that 'BION!' to find out if it was really true: "Dear Joe, read this in Ripley's column today, can you confirm that it's true?"

About 80 per cent of the letters he wrote, he got a response. People wrote back to Wayne, saying, "Yes, we really do have a three-legged duck." And he kept the responses in a scrapbook, and a log – how many letters he'd written, how many came back with a 'no', how many with a 'yes', how many 'no replies'. When he died in the mid-70s, his widow sold us 39 volumes of his scrapbooks – I'm talking thousands of pages of letters he received. We used to have a Wayne Harbour display in every museum!

> "RIPLEY IS MORE POPULAR THAN THE PRESIDENT – HE'S AN INTERNATIONAL FIGURE"


GREAT IN DEATH!
FANTASTIC BURIAL CEREMONIAL OF A CONGO CHIEF
THE BODY IS BLOWN UP SEVERAL TIMES ITS NATURAL SIZE AND STUFFED WITH ALL THE PERSONAL BELONGINGS OF THE DEPARTED
The Richer the Chief - the Greater the Funeral

COURTESY OF RIPLEY'S

FT: And did he ever catch Ripley's out?

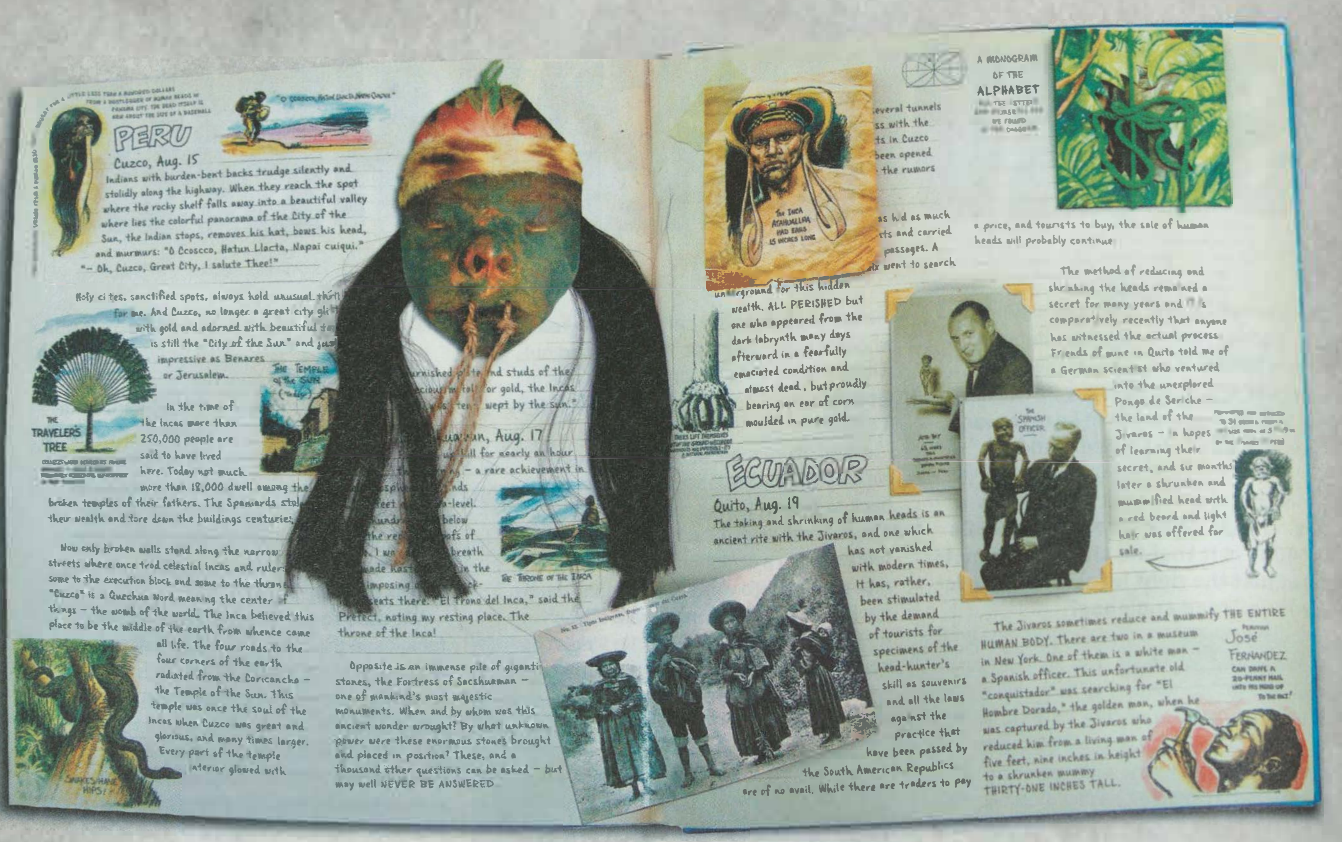
EM: Well, if people knew that something wasn't true, then they never responded to him! But, we tried very hard only to ever print the truth. If we put our name on it then you should be able to believe it. I'm sure that, occasionally, Ripley's has got something wrong; if Wayne Harbour never came across one of those, then he had an uncanny ability to pick the right ones!

We used to say that, with the American tabloids, if the story says "Joe Smith of Iowa" rather than "Joe Smith of Bedford, Iowa", you knew the story wasn't true, because you're never going to be able to find Joe Smith. If I see "Mermaid found in Florida", forget it. But if I see "Woman from Long Beach, California, makes laundry lint art" then I'm going to find that lady and I'm going to buy laundry lint art! And in fact, I did – some of the best artwork I've ever bought for Ripley's: one of her bigger pieces was a life-size John Wayne made out of laundry lint.

FT: We know that, behind the flamboyant and outgoing Ripley, there was another, unsung hero, a man we might think of as being closer to Charles Fort. Did you ever meet Norbert Pearlroth?

EM: An interesting character. I met him twice. He was an old curmudgeon by then, but he was my hero. As a library student, as a researcher – this is the guru. He is Mr Trivia! Fifty-three years he worked with Ripley's; started with Robert Ripley in 1923 as a translator, and was still going strong 20 years after Ripley died. He spent six days a week, every week, in the same reading room of the New York Public Library. It now has a bronze plaque saying that it's the Norbert Pearlroth Reading Room. He just sat and read – he read in 14 languages, 20 books a day, for his entire life! And wrote everything down in hieroglyphs.

This was the most disappointing day of my life – I went to buy the Norbert Pearlroth diaries, telling the story of everything that Ripley ever did, and I couldn't read a single word of them! It was all in boxes, but the only thing you could figure out was that the entries were by year. It's interesting that the archive materials from when Ripley was alive are mostly original letters and photographs;


O Ccoscco, Hatun Llacta, Napai Cuiqui
THE TEMPLE of the SUN (Today)
THE TRAVELER'S TREE
THE THRONE OF THE INCA
SNAKES HAVE HIPS!
THE INCA ATAHUALLPA HAD EARS 15 INCHES LONG
A MONOGRAM OF THE ALPHABET
TREES LIFT THEMSELVES
THE SPANISH OFFICER
PERUVIAN JOSÉ FERNANDEZ CAN DRIVE A 20-PENNY NAIL INTO HIS HEAD UP TO THE HILT!

PERU

Cuzco, Aug. 15

Indians with burden-bent backs trudge silently and stolidly along the highway. When they reach the spot where the rocky shelf falls away into a beautiful valley where lies the colorful panorama of the City of the Sun, the Indian stops, removes his hat, bows his head, and murmurs: "O Ccoscco, Hatun Llacta, Napai cuiqui." "– Oh, Cuzco, Great City, I salute Thee!"

Holy cities, sanctified spots, always hold unusual thr
for me. And Cuzco, no longer a great city gli
with gold and adorned with beautiful te
is still the "City of the Sun" and jus
impressive as Benares
or Jerusalem.

In the time of the Incas more than 250,000 people are said to have lived here. Today not much more than 18,000 dwell among the broken temples of their fathers. The Spaniards stol
their wealth and tore down the buildings centuries

Now only broken walls stand along the narrow
streets where once trod celestial Incas and rulers
some to the execution block and some to the thron
"Cuzco" is a Quechua word meaning the center of things – the womb of the world. The Inca believed this place to be the middle of the earth from whence came all life. The four roads to the four corners of the earth radiated from the Coricancha – the Temple of the Sun. This temple was once the soul of the Incas when Cuzco was great and glorious, and many times larger. Every part of the temple interior glowed with

urnished plate and studs of the
cious metal or gold, the Incas
wept by the sun."

uaman, Aug. 17
hill for nearly an hour
– a rare achievement in
nds
feet
a-level.
below
the re
ofs of
I wa
breath
made hast
in the
imposing
eats there. "El Trono del Inca," said the Prefect, noting my resting place. The throne of the Inca!

Opposite is an immense pile of giganti
stones, the Fortress of Sacshuaman – one of mankind's most majestic monuments. When and by whom was this ancient wonder wrought? By what unknown power were these enormous stones brought and placed in position? These, and a thousand other questions can be asked – but may well NEVER BE ANSWERED.

everal tunnels
ss with the
ts in Cuzco
been opened
the rumors

as hid as much
ts and carried
passages. A
went to search
underground for this hidden wealth. ALL PERISHED but one who appeared from the dark labrynth many days afterward in a fearfully emaciated condition and almost dead, but proudly bearing an ear of corn moulded in pure gold.

ECUADOR

Quito, Aug. 19

The taking and shrinking of human heads is an ancient rite with the Jivaros, and one which has not vanished with modern times. It has, rather, been stimulated by the demand of tourists for specimens of the head-hunter's skill as souvenirs and all the laws against the practice that have been passed by the South American Republics are of no avail. While there are traders to pay a price, and tourists to buy, the sale of human heads will probably continue.

The method of reducing and shrinking the heads remained a secret for many years and it's comparatively recently that anyone has witnessed the actual process. Friends of mine in Quito told me of a German scientist who ventured into the unexplored Pongo de Seriche – the land of the Jivaros – in hopes of learning their secret, and six months later a shrunken and mummified head with a red beard and light hair was offered for sale.

The Jivaros sometimes reduce and mummify THE ENTIRE HUMAN BODY. There are two in a museum in New York. One of them is a white man – a Spanish officer. This unfortunate old "conquistador" was searching for "El Hombre Dorado," the golden man, when he was captured by the Jivaros who reduced him from a living man of five feet, nine inches in height to a shrunken mummy THIRTY-ONE INCHES TALL.

then, in the 1950s, there's presumably some turmoil after his death and all we've got to go on are Norbert's notations; but by 1958 you get the invention of the Xerox machine and we've got, not originals, but Xeroxed pages – something that you can use to say, "OK, it came from a book by so-and-so and it's on page 62," which means you can check that a specific cartoon was based on some book Norbert found in the New York Public Library.

And that's where he did all his work. This is not a guy who travelled. He just took the subway, went to the reading room, took 12 books in Arabic down from the shelves and spent the day reading them. There's a couple of pictures of Norbert having fun, suggesting that he was at least invited to the party when it was in New York. Ripley paid for Norbert's kids to go to school, he bought them a nice house, but Norbert is never in the limelight. He's the ghost – and people never realise that Ripley isn't the guy who's finding all this stuff.

FT: How did the odditoriums and museums come into being?

EM: The first Ripley museums date from the 1930s. The very first one was in Chicago in 1933, for the World's Fair. In 1939, he opened the first permanent museum in New York City. It actually didn't last that long, although it was built to last. And that's where things really separate: in 1939, the Odditorium is no longer just him. He's now too busy to be the MC every night at the show. And in 1939, the New York museum failed. Perhaps he wasn't involved enough, so it didn't have the Ripley touch, and that's probably why it didn't last. After his death, we built a second museum in New York City that ended up being there for roughly 20 years. And this year, we opened our third museum there, in Times Square – it's by far the biggest and best museum we've ever done, at least until next year when we open in London, in the Trocadero Centre in Piccadilly Circus. This will be three times the size of any other Ripley museum – it's going to be major!

> "IN GENERAL, RIPLEY TENDED TO STEER CLEAR OF PARANORMAL STUFF"

FT: It sounds as though the big urban centres are tough nuts to crack, and that Ripley's natural constituency has tended to lie elsewhere – for instance, the Odditorium in Blackpool here in the UK…

EM: That's a great location for us – year in, year out, lots of repeat visits with people going there for their holidays every year. We're literally attached to Pleasure Beach, with the rollercoaster going right over our building. And that's the kind of place that, typically, Ripley's is. The real reason we haven't been in urban centres is that we can't afford the rent. But today's investors can afford to pay New York and London prices. We're paying more for the billboard in Times Square than we've paid in rent at many of our other locations! So, we are looking at other big urban centres – Paris, Singapore, Beijing, for instance – for the future.

FT: Will opening Ripley's in Beijing or Singapore mean that the museums will reflect local culture?

EM: The exact opposite! We'll give 'em America! Just as we will here in London. One exhibit will be an Austin Mini decorated with a million Swarovski crystals in the shape of American icons like the Statue of Liberty, the Bald Eagle, Mount Rushmore and the American flag. Real Americana on an English car! And actually created by an Englishman. He's made another one covered with British icons, but we're going to put that somewhere else.

FT: So have the kinds of curiosities you collect for the museums changed over time?

EM: Well, I'm the closest thing we've got to Mr Ripley at this point in time. I fundamentally try very hard to think like him: "If Ripley was alive, would he buy this shrunken head?" And while the mix is probably still 70 per cent older style oddities, there are now many things – say robotics or the space programme – that didn't exist in Ripley's time. So I have to look for the unusual, the unbelievable, the 'wow factor' that *would* have attracted Mr Ripley had he seen this stuff.

FT: Would you buy something like the infamous Virgin Mary toasted sandwich? What do you think about the Las Vegas casino that bought that item?

EM: They're fools! Plain and simple. I'd be interested in it as a donation. The 'Madonna toast' came to me a year before it was sold, and I wouldn't pay five dollars for it.

FT: What is your attitude to material that might be described as paranormal?

HOW TO SHRINK YOUR OWN HEAD: EDWARD MEYER ON THE ART OF MAKING *TSANTSAS*

"*Tsantsa* is the proper name for a shrunken head, as traditionally made by the Jivaro tribe of Ecuador and the Peruvian borders. The Jivaro have always been renowned as warriors, and remain fiercely independent to this day; they'll tell you proudly that they were the only tribe not conquered by the Spanish.

"I'm not an authority, but there's evidence to suggest that the Jivaro were making *tsantsas*, at least once in a while, as late as the 1970s. The practice was officially outlawed in 1911, but definitely still going on in the 1920s. There's film footage from 1946 of a guy demonstrating how to do it on a cow's head – but, clearly, he still knows how to do it as late as the 1940s!

"Basically, to make a *tsantsa*, a cut is made from the base of the skull to the top of the head – obviously the guy's head is chopped off in the first place! Then, the skin is peeled back, the skull is removed and the head is literally just boiled – some people say there's secret herbs and spices, but basically it's boiled – and it is repeatedly taken out of the fire and shaped, so that the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the ears all keep their shape and stay the same. The hair will never deteriorate. At some point, after two or three simmerings, they sew the head back up, keeping the neck open with a brace that's sewn in, and hot rocks and sand are put in it to scorch the inside and shrink the head further. Then, finally, it's put over the fire and smoked to harden up the skin. This particular head is about 100 years old and it's in pretty good shape.

"Now, something that's missing from this particular head is the string on the top – after all, these things are worn as necklaces. It's a war trophy – you admired this guy so much that you thought his soul was worth capturing; you've killed him, you've captured his soul and that makes you a better, stronger warrior, and the proof that you did it is that you kept his head.

"Fundamental to the *tsantsa* is the idea of the *muisak*, or avenging spirit. The whole point of the process is to prevent this avenging spirit coming back and killing some person in your family. You've captured your enemy's soul, and you're going to keep it locked so it can't seek revenge on you. Literally, by sewing up the mouth of the shrunken head, you stop the spirit from going back and telling his brothers that you killed him!

"Anyway, it's a marketing man's dream – *Tsantsa* is coming to town with this wonderful book, just in time for the festive season!"

EM: In general, Ripley tended to steer clear of paranormal stuff – because you can't prove it. He prided himself on being called the biggest liar in the world – but fundamental to the whole Believe It Or Not! thing is that I can actually *show* you the shrunken head – I didn't make this up, here is one! And I stay away from the paranormal based on that. You show me a photo – I love it, I really can't explain it; it looks like poltergeist activity to me, but I can't prove that. So, we typically don't publish that kind of material.

FT: Could you tell us about the new book?

EM: The book is called *Search for the Shrunken Head and Other Curiosities*, and I'm very proud of it. The actual text of the book is Robert Ripley's diaries – which we mentioned earlier. What we've done is to create a round-the-world trip – which is bending the chronology a bit as he didn't necessarily go to Burma right after he went to India – in a logical order that gets him all the way around the world, ending in South America where he finds this iconic image of the shrunken head. It's a fascinating account of the 1920s and 30s, a time capsule in that sense. But you learn a lot about the man, Robert Ripley, and you learn a little bit about the things that are in our museums – Tibetan skull bowls, New Guinea ancestor skulls, lily slippers from China – and of course shrunken heads. So, it's culturally interesting material presented in a really entertaining, fun sort of way. Every single page has little, hidden things – fold-outs, pop-ups, Ripley's actual sketches from his diaries, postcards, photos that Ripley either took himself or is in. It's all original Ripley material from the archives. The text is verbatim out of the diaries, but we've chosen lighter material as the book is geared for a younger audience, though I think anyone will enjoy it.

It's full of some of Ripley's favourite curiosities, like Wang the Unicorn Man. There's a picture of Ripley drawing him – a guy who dug a hole in the middle of his head, stuck a candle in it and hired himself out as a night-time tour guide!

There is only one thing in the entire book that *isn't* a genuine item from the archives. Essentially, we had to come up with a gimmick, a device to explain *why* this book exists: we have a letter written in the style of William Randolph Hearst telling Ripley to do a trip around the world, and it's simply signed 'the Boss'– and yours truly wrote the letter. I had fun doing that!

FT: Why does the shrunken head give the book its title?

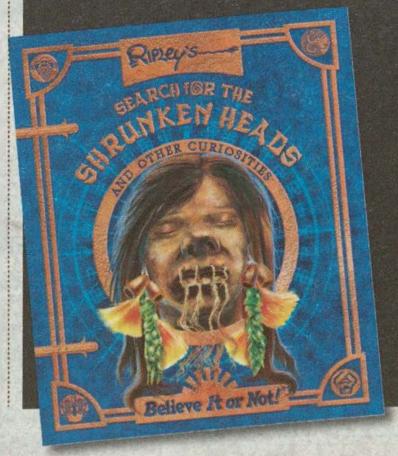
EM: Well, I think it's the only thing we have in every single Ripley museum; and because of that it is clearly *the* iconic Ripley artefact. There are some in other museums, but there's very few places in the world where you can go and see a shrunken head except Ripley's. So it's become the single image representing what people *want* to see and, more importantly, *expect* to see.

With that in mind, and with the book being laid out as a search for the kinds of things in Ripley exhibits, it seemed natural that the best thing he's going to find at the end of this trip around the world looking for BION!s, is going to be a shrunken head. And visually, it makes for a great cover.

We now have the biggest collection of heads in the world – 112 of them. There was a gentleman in the Baltimore area named Robert White who had the largest individual collection. He died a few years ago, and we bought 32 of the 36 heads he had owned – amazing pieces. White knew what he was looking for: not just any old shrunken head, only the best. We recently bought ten heads from a guy in Belgium over the Net – now how's that for weird Internet shopping?

For more on shrunken heads, see FT106:40–41.

WIN A COPY OF *SEARCH FOR THE SHRUNKEN HEADS*!



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A fortean's collectables

PATRICK HUYGHE pays tribute to Steven Catherwood Horton, an average family man with a passionate love of forteana.

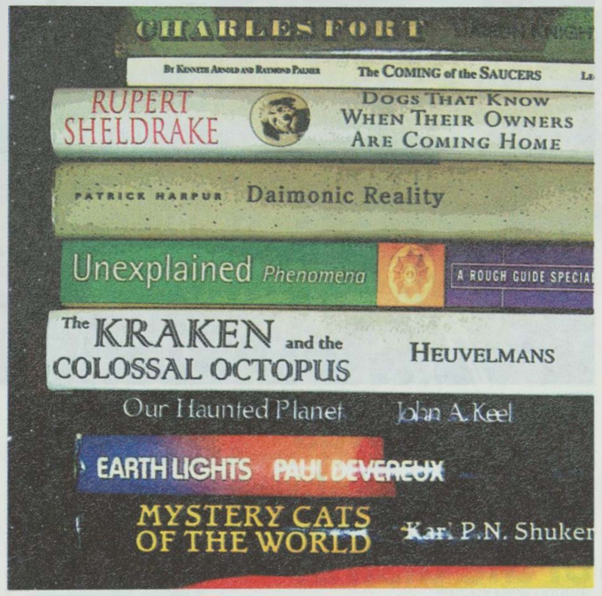
PATRICK HUYGHE has co-edited *The Anomalist* for many years, in print and online, and currently runs Anomalist Books.

I didn't know Steve Horton until I received an email from him on 30 April 2007. The text quickly grabbed my attention: "I have terminal cancer and probably have around six months to a year to live. I've dealt with that and it doesn't need to be considered except as a factor in what I'd like to do at this point. I've been reading and collecting books for around 40 years and after reading *Fortean Times*'s 100 Essential Books list several years ago [**FT100:57–58**], I decided to organise a collection of fortean books. My collection now has 95 of the fortean list and consists of around 700 books."

Steve was 58 years old. He was married, with a married daughter and a grandchild. He held a BS Accounting Degree from the University of South Carolina and worked for SCANA Corporation as an accounting supervisor. He had subscribed to *Fortean Times* since issue 76 and had all the issues of *The Anomalist* journal as well as many of the titles published by Anomalist Books.

The email then went on to present his dilemma; it's one that many ageing fortean book collectors face, only in Steve's case, the situation was pressing. "My wife has no interest in my collection whatsoever and would have no idea of how to dispose of it, but even though she will be well looked after, I'd like to be able to get her some benefit. I'm not looking to make a killing on my collection, and I have also considered a donation if that turns out to be an available option, but there may also be a business opportunity for me, someone else or another collector."

I immediately called Steve and we talked at length about his immaculately preserved and catalogued collection and what to do with the books he had accumulated since he was 18 years old.


CHARLES FORT
By Kenneth Arnold and Raymond Palmer
The COMING of the SAUCERS
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PATRICK HARPUR Daimonic Reality
Unexplained Phenomena
A ROUGH GUIDE SPECIAL
The KRAKEN and the COLOSSAL OCTOPUS
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Our Haunted Planet
John A. Keel
EARTH LIGHTS PAUL DEVEREUX
MYSTERY CATS OF THE WORLD
Karl P.N. Shuker

I suggested that he contact Bob Girard of Arcturus Books in Florida. Bob buys collections of this kind regularly and resells the books to those on his mailing list. But Steve didn't particularly like the idea of the collection being split up. In a subsequent phone call, I offered to put an ad up on *The Anomalist* website to see if anyone might be interested in acquiring his collection. He liked this idea, as he wasn't so much interested in how much the offer was as long as someone was as passionate as he was about the collection.

I placed the ad at the top of our online news section at the beginning of July. Surely one of the 5,000 people who come by the site every day would be interested, I thought. After receiving just one reply, I asked Steve if he wanted me to put "urgent" on the ad. He said no, the doctor had told him that he had "a good while left".

Then a couple of weeks passed, and when I spoke to Steve he told me that although a couple more people had contacted him, no one seemed really serious, just curious. Loren Coleman suggested that Steve split up his collection into smaller topic collections, as he would be more likely to sell his UFO books to UFO people, cryptozoology books to cryptozoologists, and so on. I thought this was a good idea, but Steve began leaning more towards donating the books. The question was where? I know of several forteans who are getting up there in age and are wondering just where to donate their books. Most libraries have no interest in these subjects or simply sell off the books at library book sales.

At the end of July, I received a phone call from Steve. He thanked me for putting up the ad but he was still undecided about what to do. I was packing for a two-week vacation and told him I would call him when I got back. We were going to have a long and thorough discussion about all things fortean.

When I called Steve on 15 August, a woman with an English accent answered the phone. She informed me that Steve had passed away a week earlier on the 7th. I was in shock and felt terrible. I was too late. When I finally managed to say something, I asked what Steve had decided to do with his collection. She told me that he was leaning to donating it to the University of South Carolina library as they had apparently expressed an interest in it when he contacted them. I told her to please call me if the university library changed its mind.

I looked up Steve's obituary and learned that he had graduated from the University of South Carolina in 1976 and had been a US Air Force staff sergeant with the military police stationed at RAF Chicksands Air Base in Bedfordshire, where he met his wife of 37 years and where his daughter was born. The obituary, published in *The State* newspaper on 9 August 2007, mentioned that he was a "reader who had a prize collection of books".

I suspect that there are a lot of forteans like Steve Horton out there: quiet and passionate about the subject, and many with prize book collections. I think they deserve recognition as much as the big names of the field, for they provide the foundation that enables the stars in our firmament to shine.

I wish I could have done more for Steve. But I can do this. I know he would have been thrilled to see this brief note on his life in the pages of *Fortean Times*. FT

The man who found the Holy Grail

Historian Mark Oxbrow thinks he's found a literary and mystical legend – central to many conspiracy theories and alternate histories – and, as **GORDON RUTTER** reveals, it's been hiding in plain sight in a certain Paris art museum...

GORDON RUTTER is a freelance writer and lecturer based in Edinburgh. He is a regular *FT* contributor and organiser of the Edinburgh Fortean Society.

According to the *New Catholic Dictionary*,[1] the Holy Grail is "a legendary sacred vessel, identified with the chalice of the Eucharist or the dish of the Paschal Lamb, and the theme of a medieval cycle of romance". It "is said to have been the dish... used by Joseph of Arimathea to gather the Precious Blood of Christ." And, according to author, historian and folklorist Mark Oxbrow, the Grail has actually been found.

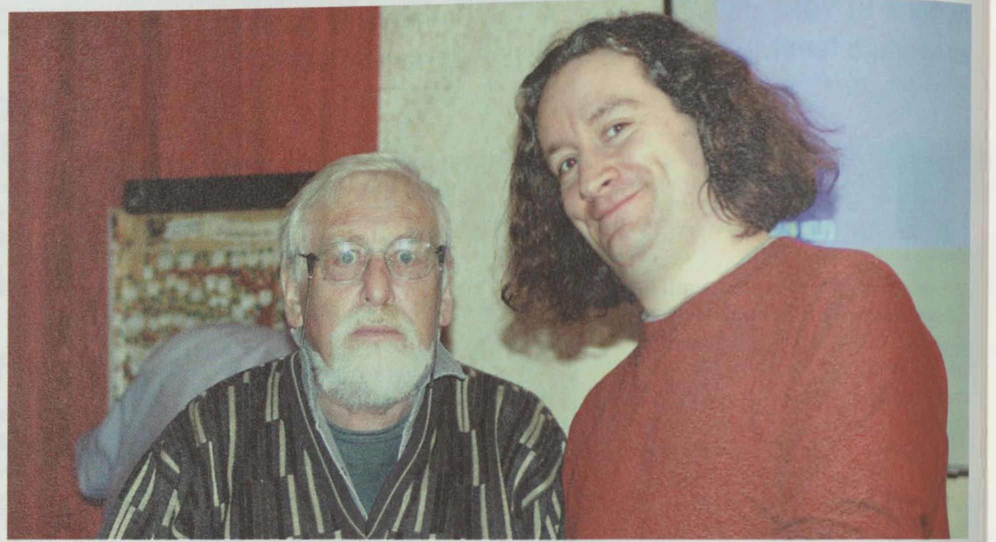
Of course, the Grail was once in the hands of Indiana Jones, but even he ultimately lost it; so what makes Oxbrow's claims special? Why should we believe him when we already have several Grails, including the Nantios Cup, the "Holy Bloodline" of Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln's *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and the Stone Tablets of the Ark of the Covenant in Graham Hancock's *The Sign and The Seal*? And the foregoing is a non-exclusive list; a full tally of all claimants to being the Holy Grail would take considerably more room than space permits.

Before we examine Oxbrow's claim, it might be worth establishing exactly what it is we're actually talking about.

Traditionally, the Grail is said to be the plate used for the Last Supper, or a cup used to catch the blood of Christ on the cross. Where do these ideas come from? Three of the four Gospels of the New Testament specifically mention a cup or platter at the Last Supper – perhaps not all that surprising, as it was a meal, after all. None mention a vessel used by Joseph of Arimathea, or anyone else, to collect the Blood of Christ while on the Cross. The closest we have to a biblical mention of blood and a vessel is when Christ pours wine into a cup and urges the assembled Disciples to drink of his blood. So that's pretty much all we can glean from the Bible.

For the next mention of the Grail we have to wait for an event which supposedly happened in AD 717 but was not recorded in writing until about 1200. In 717, according to the Cistercian chronicler Helinandus, a hermit was shown a vision of the dish of the Last Supper. This learned hermit then wrote a book in Latin, entitled *Gradale. Gradale* is the mediæval Latin for 'dish', and the Old French for dish was *Gradalis*, whence we get *graal*, *greal* and *greel*. One short leap across the English Channel and we end up with 'grail'.

GORDON RUTTER



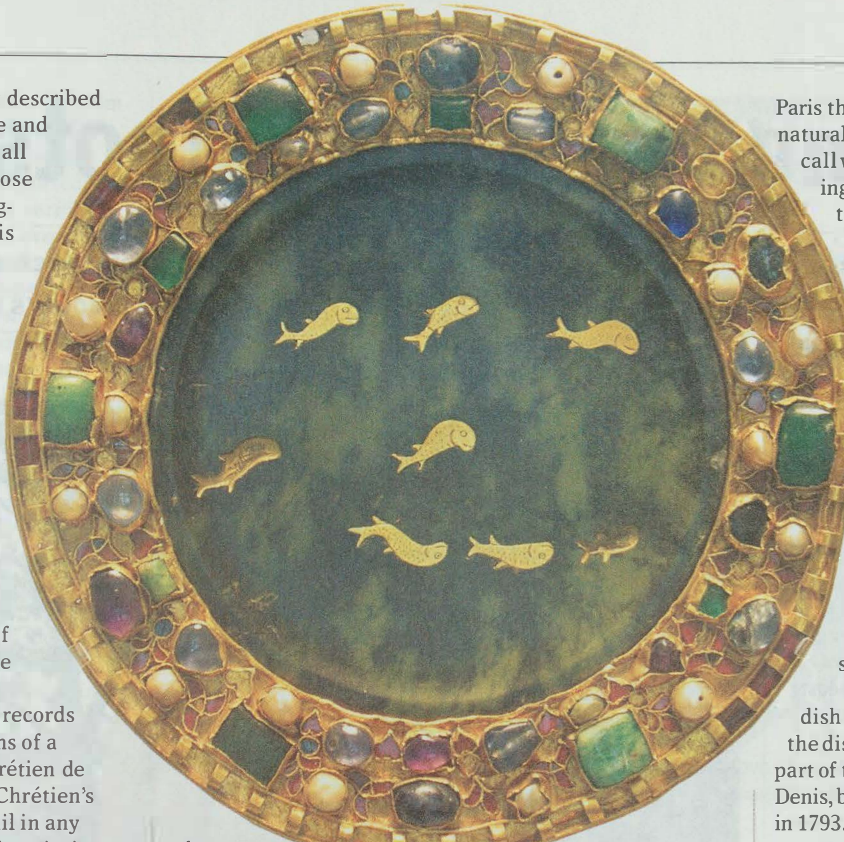
ABOVE: Mark Oxbrow (right) with *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* co-author Henry Lincoln.

A hermit was shown a vision of the dish of the Last Supper

Sticking with French for a moment, the phrase *san greal* means Holy Grail. A slight alteration gives us *sang real*, which means Holy Blood. And the Grail as the Holy Bloodline of Christ is where Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln (not to mention Dan Brown) come into the picture. According to this reading of the legend, the Grail is the womb of Mary Magdalene and the Holy Blood is the bloodline – the direct lineal descendants of Jesus, no less. For the purpose of Mark Oxbrow's discovery, we are, however, sticking with a literal grail rather than a metaphorical one (which has, quite frankly, been done to death recently!)

So, we have a date of 717 (or 1200) for the first reference outside of the Bible to the dish of the Last Supper. This dish was described by Hellinandus as follows: "*Gradalis* or *Gradale* means a dish (*scutella*), wide and somewhat deep, in which costly viands are wont to be served to the rich in degrees (*gradatim*), one morsel after another in different rows. In popular speech it is also called '*greal*' because it is pleasant (*grata*) and acceptable to him eating therein." The other main mentions of the Grail come from the mediæval Grail Romances, the majority of which were written between 1180 and 1240.

The first was written by Chrétien de Troyes and was entitled *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail*. Regrettably, this beautiful tale is incomplete and cuts off virtually in mid-sentence; terribly inconvenient of Chrétien to die before he finished his most famous work. He describes the Grail as a flat platter made of pure, refined gold and set with the most costly stones of the Earth and the sea. He is also quite specific in saying it was not used to carry pike or lamprey or salmon but it was reserved for the Sacred Host – the Holy Wafer consecrated during mass. The next Grail Romance was penned by Wolfram von Eschenbach and entitled *Parzival*.



In *Parzival*, the Grail is not described other than as a green stone and an object which surpasses all Earthly perfection and whose delights resemble the Kingdom of Heaven; indeed, it is referred to as *lapsit exillis* – the stone from the Heavens. Most commentators believe that *Parzival* is a reworking of Chrétien's *Perceval* with an ending added for good measure. This doesn't detract in any way from the wonder of von Eschenbach's work, but it doesn't help us in our current Grail quest.

Many subsequent additions and embellishments of the Grail legend were made over the years, but we can safely say that the earliest records are: the Gospels, the dreams of a hermit and the work of Chrétien de Troyes. And of these, only Chrétien's romance describes the Grail in any detail. But where did this description come from? Was it merely artistic invention or something more?

Chrétien moved in the highest circles of his time, *Perceval* was dedicated to Philip of Flanders, who was to be the second husband of Countess Marie de Champagne, Chrétien's patroness. For unknown reasons, the engagement was broken off and the marriage did not take place. Marie was the eldest daughter of King Louis VII of France and the half sister of Richard the Lionheart and King John of England. When Louis VII went on a Crusade, he left Marie at the Abbey of St Denis, which he had endowed with many treasures, as had many other monarchs. It is said that many jewels and rings were encrusted in the alter and left in the treasury. Through subsequent years, Marie maintained strong links with the Abbey, and Chrétien would have visited frequently and been familiar with the many treasures held therein – delights such as the *Patène de Serpentine* and the Cup of the Ptolemies. Eventually, with the French Revolution, the treasures were broken up and distributed throughout France.

Let us return for a moment to our historian and author Mark Oxbrow. Mark has written and lectured extensively on Rosslyn Chapel and the Holy Grail and his great passion is mediæval history, so it was no great surprise when he was approached by Simon Cox to co-author a book in Cox's A to Z series – *An A to Z of King Arthur and the Holy Grail*. Mark was working on this in the summer of 2006, when he decided a break was in order and Paris the destination of choice – where, naturally enough, one of the ports of call was to be the Louvre. Eschewing the *Da Vinci Code* tours and the crowds around the Mona Lisa, Mark found himself, for no particular reason, in the Richelieu wing of mediæval treasures. Mark's wife Jill called him over to look at one particular piece, a rather attractive dish. A dark green stone (serpentine) platter with a gold surround set with various jewels, inlaid with gold fish. Some of the fish were missing, but the pearls, sapphires, emeralds, moonstones, amethysts, garnets and coloured glass in the gold surround were still present.

Mark realised he had heard this dish described before; when he read the display card, he discovered it was part of the treasure of the Abbey of St Denis, brought to the Musée du Louvre in 1793. A platter of stone (Wolfram von Eschenbach) made of pure, refined gold and set with the most costly stones of the Earth and the sea (Chrétien de Troyes). These are the descriptions of the Grail, yet they are *also* descriptions of the *Patène de Serpentine* which Mark found in front of him in the Louvre. Could *this* be the Holy Grail itself?

The *Patène de Serpentine* is dated to between 100 BC and AD 100 by the Louvre, with a gold surround added in the late ninth century by King Charles the Bald. It is a treasure with which Chrétien would have been familiar and it would have been highly prized – a gift to the Abbey from Emperor Charlemagne himself. So, reasons Mark Oxbrow, Chrétien had a very specific dish in mind when he described the Holy Grail, and this dish, decorated with fishes (an early Christian symbol), is currently on display in the Louvre.

Is it the mythical Holy Grail? Well, we may never be able to answer that question with certainty, but it *does* seem to be the Holy Grail of Chrétien de Troyes; and, after all, he pretty much started the tradition of the Holy Grail as we know it today.

So, Mark has gone one better than Indiana Jones – he's found the Grail and he still knows exactly where it is: Section 01, Window V13, The Richelieu wing of Mediæval Treasures, Musée du Louvre, Paris. FT

PARIS 1400
Prolongation jusqu'au 18 juillet

ABOVE: The *Patène de Serpentine*, now on display at the Louvre. It seems to fit the original literary description of the Holy Grail, and may have been known to author Chrétien de Troyes.

BELOW: The Louvre gallery in Paris, complete with suitably pyramidal sculpture.

BOTH PIX: GORDON RUTTER

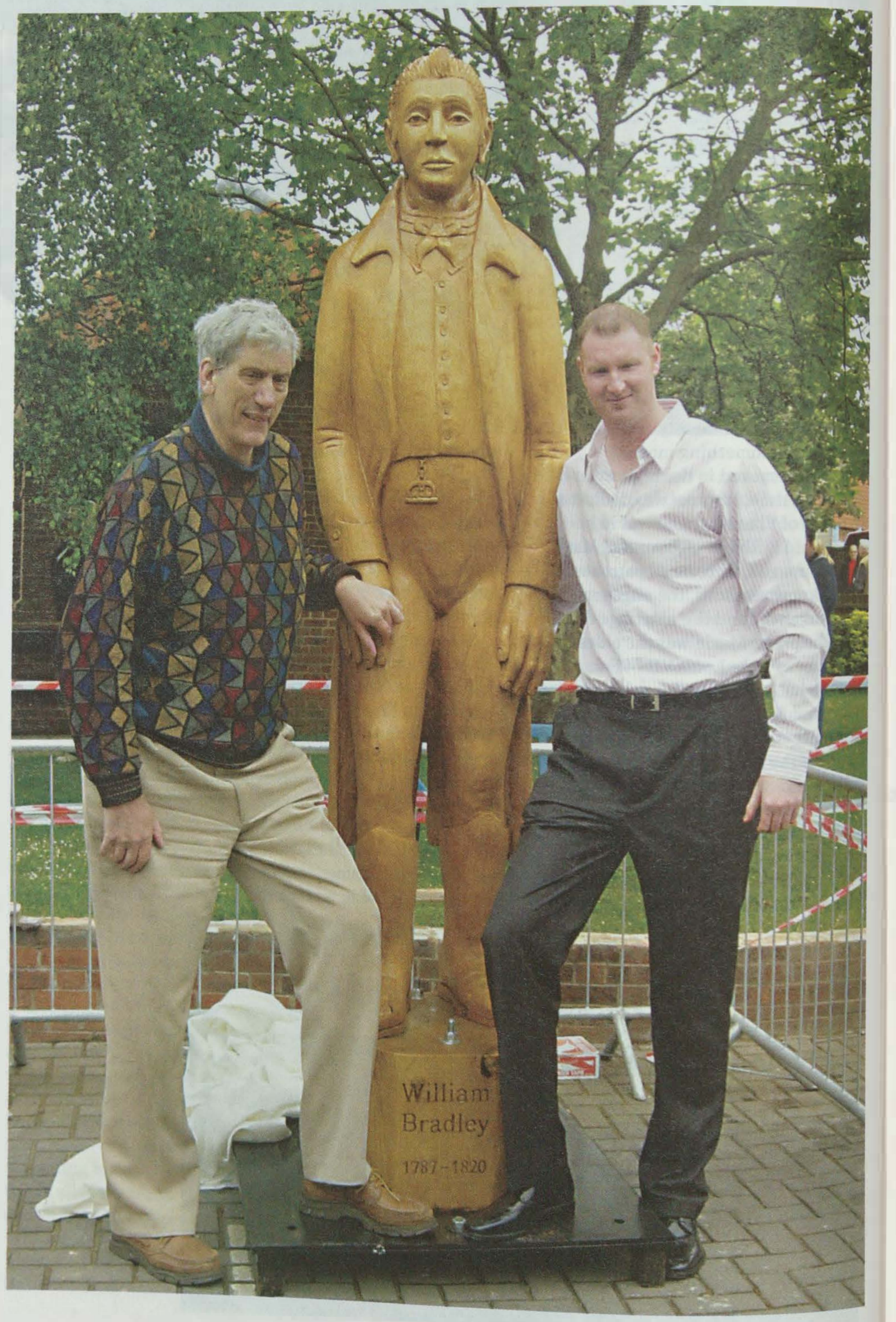
NOTES

[1] www.catholic-forum.com/saints/ncd03983.htm

Following in a giant's footsteps

Giants loom large in world folklore, but sometimes they can have a real historic presence and known origin. **JOHN REPPION** visited the Yorkshire town of Market Weighton to uncover William Bradley's story.

JOHN REPPION scripts comic books with his wife, Leah Moore, and writes for *The Anomalist* and *Strange Attractor Journal*. He is currently working on a book about Liverpool's ghosts.



JOHN REPPION

The historic market town of Market Weighton stands roughly midway between the cities of York and Hull in the north-east of England. The village was recorded under the name of *Wicstun* in the Domesday Book of 1086 and is believed to have existed as a settlement of some kind or another for at least 7,000 years. Impressive as all that may be, I had another reason for visiting the parish on the final Sunday of May 2007 – it was my chance to witness the annual celebration which has become known simply as *Giant Bradley Day*.

The first Giant Bradley Day took place in May 1996, the brainchild of a handful of Market Weighton residents, with the dual purpose of celebrating the town's heritage and creating an entertaining day's events for locals and tourists alike. Market Weighton's main thoroughfare is closed to traffic during the occasion and a host of stalls selling everything from charity shop bric-a-brac to locally produced meats and cheeses line the streets. There are craft demonstrations, performances from local bands, jugglers, dancers, stilt walkers, Punch and Judy shows, donkey rides, and even a gathering of the local Morris Minor owners' club. In many ways, it's the very epitome of an old fashioned English summer fayre; except, of course, for the giants.

William Bradley was born in Market Weighton on 10 February 1787 to John and Ann Bradley, weighing in at a whopping one stone (14lb / 6.4kg). William was the fourth son in what was eventually a family of 13, the rest of whom (with the possible exception of a sister who tragically died at the age of 16) were of normal stature. By the time William was 20, however, he is said to have weighed 27 stone (378 lb / 171kg) and measured 7ft 9in (2.36m), making him the tallest Englishman ever recorded.[1]

Billed as *The Yorkshire Giant*, William spent several years touring around Great Britain with various travelling fairs and shows (*Barnum's* reportedly being the first [2]), apparently earning quite a reasonable wage and even meeting King George IV on one occasion. Eventually, however, growing weary of the cramped conditions of caravan living, Bradley decided to retire from show business and return home to Market Weighton. William had a new house built on the town's Northgate (now York Road) – the very spot where he was born. The home's proportions were specially tailored to accommodate the giant's extraordinary size and the structure still stands, long since converted into a high-ceilinged shop. A plaque on the building's outer wall shows an outline of Bradley's foot, some 15 inches (38.1cm) in length and five and three quarter inches (14.6 cm) in width.

A further 21 gigantic footprints adorn the pavement at various points throughout Market Weighton, marking a path which guides the walker on a pleasant tour of the town's most ancient and notable locations. Footprint number seven marks the beautiful All Saints Church, portions of which have stood since the 12th century. It is inside this church that William's body now lies, the giant having succumbed to tuberculosis on 30 May 1820 at the age of 33. His remains were moved from their original resting place in the churchyard for fear that his body might be disinterred and sold on the black market.

Though William Bradley may be nearly 200 years in his grave, giants do still walk the streets of his home town – on one day of the year at least. Since the very first Giant Bradley Day, pituitary giant Christopher Paul Greener has been a regular guest at the festival. Until very recently, Greener was officially the tallest living Englishman at 7ft 6.25 inches (2.3m). This year, however, Guinness formally recorded 27-year-old Neil Fingleton's height at seven feet, seven inches (2.31m), thus stripping Greener of the title which he had held for some 40 years. Happily, there seemed to be no hard feelings when the pair met in Market Weighton for the unveiling of an impressive, life-sized figure of William Bradley. The oak sculpture was carved by local artist Malcolm MacLachlan, who based the giant's attire and wistful expression upon two surviving contemporary engravings of Bradley. Originally, I am told, there were plans to have a life-size bronze of the giant installed in the town square but, sadly, funds were insufficient. In any case, the locals seemed very pleased with MacLachlan's work and the fine-looking oak effigy should more than suffice for the time being.

Soon after the unveiling ceremony was at an end, it began to rain, forcing my wife and me to take shelter in a nearby public house. Fortunately, we passed a fish and chip shop *en route* and managed to grab a little something to line our stomachs. Sitting in the warm, smoke-filled snug of a half-timbered pub, nursing a pint of Guinness and watching the rain through the window, I found myself wondering – could there really be a more fitting end to a traditional English summer fayre? FT

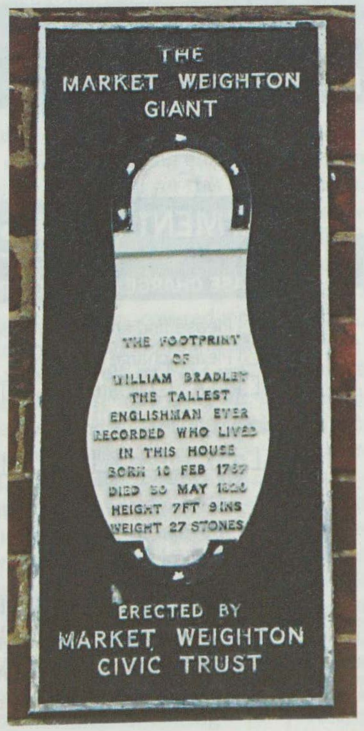
THE FATE OF A GIANT'S HAND

While seeking information on William Bradley, I found his name listed under the heading *Giants of other note* in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. The entry states: "His right hand is preserved in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons." This was, naturally, something I felt I must investigate further. Having written to the College querying the entry, I received an email from Senior Curator Simon Chaplin explaining: "According to our records, a cast of Bradley's hand (rather than the hand itself) was donated by Mr WH Bentley of Manchester in October 1832. [...] it does not appear to have been listed in any of the various catalogues of the collection published in the 19th century. I suspect that it was added to the rather miscellaneous collection of 'items of historical interest', for which no thorough catalogue was ever produced. Unfortunately, almost everything in this collection was destroyed when the College was bombed in 1941. [...] certainly the cast is no longer in our collection, so I think this is the most likely explanation of its fate."

ABOVE: The museum of the Royal College of Surgeons prior to the bombing in 1941.

By 20, Bradley was 7ft 9in tall and weighed 27 stone

For the latest news on the current world's tallest man, see p26.



John Reppion can be contacted at haunted_liverpool @btinternet.com.

LEFT: A plaque showing the outline of William Bradley's giant footprint, placed on the outer wall of the house where he was born.

OPPOSITE: Two modern giants, Christopher Paul Greener (left) and Neil Fingleton (right) with Malcolm MacLachan's oak sculpture of William Bradley, based on contemporary engravings.

JOHN REPPION

Notes

[1] Although it is widely written that William Bradley was the tallest Englishman ever, I have not been able to substantiate the claim personally. Bradley is not mentioned in the current Guinness Book of Records and, so far, Guinness have been unable to provide me with any information about either Bradley or the record. Chang Woo Gow was quite possibly the tallest non-British born person ever to live (and die) in the UK. Born in 1841 in the port town of Fychow (now in Canton province), China, Chang died in 1893 at the age of 52 in Bournemouth, Dorset. Gow's height is recorded variously as being between 7ft 9in (2.36m) – which would make him William Bradley's equal – and 8ft 2in (2.49 m).

[2] According to "The Wonderful Life of William Bradley the Yorkshire Giant of Market Weighton" by Keith Lowe, it was Barnum who came up with William's *Yorkshire Giant* moniker. Barnum was, at the time, already exhibiting a gigantic swine known simply as *the Yorkshire Pig*.

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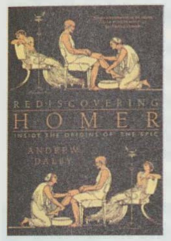
This month's books, films and games

reviews

Homer's yummy layer-cake

A sensible and witty primer about Homer (no, not *that* one) discusses the vexed questions of gender contenders and the dating of the great epic poems



Rediscovering Homer

Inside the Origins of the Epic

Andrew Dalby

WW Norton & Company

Pb, xxvi+266pp, notes, bib, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9780393330199

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Googling discloses 37,400,000 Homer sites. Deducting Simpson Senior and baseball statistics, our poet's bibliography remains brobdingnagian.

After a Cat-Sat-On-The-Mat synopsis, we get a sensible primer, jargon-free, written with panache and wit, "Alexander's photo opportunity" and "it is a lifetime's task to grasp the implication of Pindar's words" earning the Baldwin humour prize. On Voltaire's principle of judging people by their questions rather than answers, Dalby scores high, asking the right ones without claiming omniscience, a modesty rare in today's academe.

Dalby's big ideas amplify rather than innovate. His most publicised one (inevitably) concerns the possibility that Homer was female, evoking Samuel Butler's 1897 Victorian shocker *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, strangely omitting both Byzantine Homeric scholar Eustathius's claim that Egyptian priestess Phantasia (step back, Walt Disney) composed them, and Robert Graves's fictional version *Homer's Daughter*. Anthony Snodgrass asserted the *Iliad* would "bore a woman stiff", but ancient Greece had no lack of belligerent females. (When I offered a course on warfare, more women than men enrolled.) Moreover, the *edictum Snodgrassianum* leaves the *Odyssey* wide open for gender contenders.

Dalby's late dating of the epics to mid-seventh century or later follows eminent Hellenist Martin West. It is an acknowledged minority view, and plausible; it suits an age where epic was giving way to individualistic (Archilochus, Sappho, etc) lyric poetry. The argument can be endorsed by Stesichorus's (c.640–555) epic themes in non-epic metres, and Xenophanes (c.570–475), whose epic recitations denounced Homeric–Hesiodic morality.

The claim that Athenian tyrant Peisistratus (c.540) organised transcription of Homer would be the ace, except it is not seen until Cicero, being unmentioned by Herodotus: yet this Roman must have it from some earlier Greek source.

The field researches/recordings of Parry, Lord and company are familar terrain, covered most succinctly by Douglas Young and most provocatively by FM Combellack. Both are here ignored, as are the Marxist contributions of George Thomson. Of course, much of the epics' "layer-cake" (Peter Green's unimprovable term) quality is most conveniently explained by acknowledging (as Parry, though not all epigones, did) that literate and illiterate poets co-existed.

> "Snodgrass asserted the *Iliad* would 'bore a woman stiff', but Greece had no lack of belligerent females"

Dalby's doubts about stenographers' abilities to capture the performances in writing might have been further eased by Bede's account of Caedmon's pre-rehearsed recitations and their copyists: pre-rehearsed spontaneity (as in jazz) is something not always remembered in these controversies. *A propos* Homer's lone mention of "many deadly marks on a tablet," could these be instructional pictures rather than words? Nor do inconsistencies prove anything much. Another epic hero, James Bond, weeps at the end of *Casino Royale*, yet "the first tears since his childhood" are shed a year later in *Live and Let Die*.

Nowadays, both God and the Devil are in the details. Select addenda/corrigenda: Lucian says the masses still (2nd century AD) believed in Homer and Hesiod, also that (contrary to modern belief) the *Odyssey* preceded the *Iliad*. Not all would date Euripides's *Bacchae* to 407. It is news to me that Aristophanes's *Frogs* première lasted five years, also that Byzantine Homeric scholarship began precisely in AD 476. Homer him-herself names the Argo as "sung by all", thus answering Dalbyan uncertainty. Why dub a monarch "lazy or placid" for sitting through full epic recitation? Surely the opposite. Why question Hesiod's *Theogony* title? Full marks for remarking the rarity of *doule* (female slave), but why not supply the references: *Iliad* 3. 409; *Odyssey* 4. 12. Likewise, tell the presumptive general reader that Horace coined "Homer nods". Dalby takes Plato's epithet *apotheta* to denote "esoteric" Homeridæ poems, whereas Douglas Young renders it "unpublished" – it makes perhaps a big difference. Dalby unfairly dismisses WB Stanford as "one of those older critics…" In fact, this outstanding Irish scholar discusses and approves Parry's findings.

Personal Greek orthography always divides reviewers: Dalby's eclecticism combines sensible Romanisations (Pindar, Plato, etc.) with such horrors as Hekabe, Mykenai, and Thoukydides. I could go on and on.

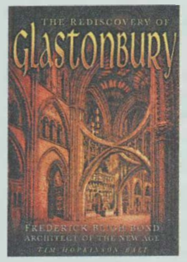
The book is printed with an accuracy nowadays rare. Endnotes emphasise primary sources and the index is painstakingly thorough. One never knows if bibliographic omissions are deliberate or negligent: I especially miss James Dee's two-volumed (2001–02) repertoire of Homeric epithets and MI Finley's notoriously sceptical article on Homeric historical veracity. Robert Bittlestone's deservedly publicised *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca* (2006; **FT204:18, 210:62**) unluckily appeared too late for consideration. The guide to further reading is wide-ranging and commendably fair-minded. As to films, *Troy* is defended for its treatment of women. We older hands recall *Helen of Troy* (1956), in which Brigitte Bardot appeared but not as Helen, and *Ulisse* (1955) with Kirk Douglas's chest.

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict
A SATISFYINGLY TASTY BIT OF HOMER COOKING **9**

Channelling Glasto

A no-nonsense bio of Bligh Bond downplays the monk's writings in favour of a rounded picture of the psychic scholar



The Rediscovery of Glastonbury

Frederick Bligh Bond, Architect of the New Age

Tom Hopkinson-Ball

Sutton Pubishing
Hb, 236pp, illus, £20.00, ISBN 9780750945646
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £20.00

For me – a Bligh Bond fan – this book is a delight and long overdue, but let me start with a gripe. The author devotes much of his prologue to trashing William Kenawell's 1965 biography of Bond, which is unfair. As he points out, Kenawell didn't have access to certain material and, moreover, was writing in the USA. Admittedly, it was sketchy in places and at times showed him in a poor light, but for 40 years it was the sole biography, and introduced many to Bond and his work.

The Bligh Bond story is not that well known. In 1908, Bond, an architect of some repute and a very good amateur archæologist, was appointed Director of Excavations for Glastonbury Abbey, which had only recently been ceded back to the Church, having been in private hands for centuries. The trustees knew of his occult leanings, but never thought that things would pan out as they did. Work went ahead and some spectacular finds put Bond in the limelight. Under pressure to reveal his methods, Bond – perhaps rashly – gave a series of lectures and wrote *The Gate of Remembrance*. It emerged that he had simply used a number of mediums (and, at times, dowsers) to make contact with long-dead monks, and it was these spirits who had guided him. Although he was given fair warning to stick to more established methods of digging, Bond persisted in holding séances – some at the Abbey site itself – until the exasperated Glastonbury trustees summarily sacked him. He went on to pursue a career in the occult in America.

For his Glastonbury work alone he deserves attention, and he is rightly touted as the father of channelling and psychic questing, something he would have hated. However, there is much more to the Bond story and Hopkinson-Ball handles it beautifully.

First, Bond was forming an idea regarding the source of the information he received. Initially, he took it to be communication from individual souls. Later he began to believe that he was privy to a manifestation of a universal memory that is open to all as long as we are in the right frame of mind. Hopkinson-Ball goes to great lengths to stress that Bond was not a Spiritualist and points out that his interest in psychic readings was part of a much broader philosophy which included freemasonry, theosophy, gematria, and Greek and Roman philosophy. In doing this, he gives us the first rounded picture of Bond, who has so often been dismissed as a crank or bracketed alongside the table-rappers and chain-rattlers.

The souls included a group calling themselves "The watchers from the other side" whose series of statements convinced Bond that a secret of immense import was hidden at Glastonbury. There were also hints that the dimensions of the Abbey hid another secret, and there may well have been a third secret encoded in the long-lost 'Loretto Chapel', where a life-sized statue of the Virgin stood on a marble plinth inlaid with the 12 houses of the Zodiac.

There was also a persistent thread regarding the re-establishment of Glastonbury as a great religious centre, though it was unclear if this was to be a physical or a spiritual revival. And for icing on the cake there was the bold statement that "a son of Glaston over the water" was about to return and take his rightful place.

Apart from spending an inordinate amount of time investigating numbers and shapes (cubes and the number '37' appear to be important), Bond remained remarkably sanguine about all this. In fact, he compromised his own integrity and standing by publishing it all unabridged, knowing full well that a lot of it made no sense. Bond was always a brave and intrepid author, and to the end maintained a reputation for accuracy and fairness.

I could criticise *The Rediscovery of Glastonbury* for not going into the readings more deeply or following Bond's career in the USA, especially the Stevens readings, but this would be unfair – and anyway this material is available elsewhere; the title makes it clear that's its about Bond and Glastonbury, and it does it very well indeed.

I loved it and couldn't put it down. I admired its factual style; too many – including Bond himself – have been seduced by the English romance of the quasi-poetic "Johannes readings" (Johannes, an Abbey monk, communicated through automatic writing) and, unlike Hopkinson-Ball, have focused on these to the detriment of Bond's other work.

Try reading it alongside *Gate of Remembrance*, which is still in print, and you'll get an insight into psychic exploration, an area still in its infancy.

For more on Bond, see **FT143:40–44.**

Jack Romano

Fortean Times Verdict
WELL OVERDUE WORK PUTS BLIGH BOND IN HIS PROPER CONTEXT **9**

Jesus in Kashmir

The Lost Tomb

Suzanne Olsson

Lulu.com
Pb, 445pp, ISBN 1419611755
BUY DIRECT FROM LULU.COM

Suzanne Olsson is deeply committed to the belief that Jesus lived and died in India. She has not just written this book: she has lived it. Recognised and respected, if only for her tenacity, Olsson has shaped her life around the pursuit of her subject. Her closeness is clearly deeply rewarding on a personal level; but as a basis for a book outlining and detailing this contentious subject, it has proved a massive stumbling block. At the very least, this book needs a committed editor, and an objective co-writer would also have been very welcome.

The book's structure, which is unhelpfully buried beneath fragmented layers of information, anecdote and beliefs, is a journey following many of the major biblical personages who the author believes lived and died in India. The book ends at the famous Rozabal shrine in Srinagar, believed by some to be the final resting place of Jesus.

As evidence for these claims, many of which have already attracted deserved academic attention, Ms Olsson brings forward a bewildering array of subjects: aliens, angels, God, Egyptology, magi, Zoroaster, Buddha, the Ark of the Covenant, to name but a few, tussle for space in a seemingly random order.

The connections, where there are any, are vague and arbitrary. It's like excavating a dinosaur bone near a coke tin and concluding that *Tyrannosaurus rex* lived on a diet of fizzy drinks.

This is a missed opportunity. Desperately lacking the academic analysis that Ms Olsson clearly respects and which can be found in other books on this topic (as well as being, at times, an almost unreadable scattergun 'theory'), this represents a missed opportunity.

Olsson's experiences have something of genuine worth to offer this fascinating subject. I hope she finds someone who can make sense of them.

Simon Price

Fortean Times Verdict
SOMETIMES ENTHUSIASM JUST ISN'T ENOUGH... **4**

Why People Believe Weird Things

Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time

Michael Shermer

Souvenir Press
Pb, 349pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780285638037
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.99

Michael Shermer is the Jeeves of doubt, the sceptic's sceptic, ready and able to resolve all irrationalities and superstitions arising in our confused times with a witty quip and an unwearyingly able mind.

In this book, he treats the usual suspects, including near-death experiences, alien abduction, creationism and witch crazes, and welcome but less common topics, including Holocaust denial and the 'cult' surrounding the idiosyncratic philosopher Ayn Rand. He also writes in the ostensibly credulous yet subtly condescending prose that sceptics have perfected. The scholarship includes philosophers, scientists and psychologists, but the usage is uncritical and contentious; chapter two especially so.

There is much to criticise in this book, so let me focus on the 'philosophical' underpinning of scepticism. As usual, there is the sceptic's over-reliance on an idealised conception of scientific knowledge, emphasising evidence, testability and verification, that philosophers of science would baulk at.

Shermer's definition of a sceptic as "one who questions the validity of a particular claim by calling for evidence to prove or disprove it" makes this clear enough: although it seems reasonable to demand proof for other's claims, to imply that evidence is only admissible if produced by scientists is not. This means that scientists become the sole epistemic authorities. This, again, may seem quite reasonable, but it neglects the fact that scientists are qualified to investigate and evaluate only certain aspects of this world; much that lies beyond the scope of scientific inquiry is, as it were, 'off-limits' to them.

Doubtless Shermer would dismiss this as special pleading on the part of, say, parapsychology or voodoo, but this just demonstrates the scientism I'm criticising.

My main opposition to 'skepticism' is that it invariably masks a commitment to some species of scientism. Scepticism expresses the view that one's beliefs must be supported by evidence, but simultaneously claims (as Shermer does in chapter two) that it is science that is the arbiter of truth claims. This is to instantly dismiss the credentials of a host of alternative religious, cultural and spiritual practices at a stroke. This makes scepticism, as the benign face of scientism, as much an ideological as an epistemological position – and arguably an aggressive and oppressive one.

Shermer himself asks, with rehearsed weariness, "If we are living in an Age of Science, then why do so many pseudoscientific and non-scientific beliefs abound?".

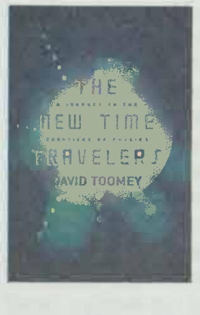
He presumes that science alone has claim to truth and knowledge and that alternative, 'non-scientific' beliefs and traditions are 'false' and therefore in need of replacement. Shermer may think himself to be a benign intellectual ombudsman, sweeping out the "superstitions and confusions" of our society; but in fact he represents a scientism which is utterly insensitive to the subtleties and significance of non-scientific traditions and beliefs. This is a good book for a sceptic to have written, for there is much to doubt in it.

Ian Kidd

Fortean Times Verdict
DEBUNKING THE USUAL SUSPECTS WITH RELENTLESS SCIENTISM **5**

To boldly go

Temporal paradoxes and mind-boggling theory galore for curious minds



The New Time Travelers

A Journey to the Frontiers of Physics

David Toomey

WW Norton
Hb, 391pp, notes, illus, gloss, bib, ind, £15.99/$25.95, ISBN 9780393060133
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

This is an excellent introduction to the development of time travel theory, from the four-dimensional ponderings of Charles Hinton (who gave HG Wells the plot device to deliver his social satire in *The Time Machine*) through to the explosion of serious theoretical research on closed timelike curves in the 1990s.

All the usual suspects are here – Einstein, Gödel, Kip Thorne, David Deutsch *et al* – as well as less familiar names such as Igor Novikov and Matt Visser. There are more temporal paradoxes than you could shake your grandfather at, as well as diversions into related areas of gee-whiz cosmology from black holes to multiple universes. David Toomey – a creative writing academic rather than the specialist science writers or researchers who usually pen such pop science tomes – gives a clear overview of the often mind-boggling theory, although more advanced readers may find the lack of detail frustrating.

Despite the book's title, there's not really much new on show here. That's not really Toomey's fault, as the pace of research has slowed since the turn of the millennium. The book closes with the work of Richard Gott, whose 2001 book *Time Travel in Einstein's Universe* (**FT154:58**) gives a more technically sophisticated account of the same matter. A handful of papers since then are summarised in the epilogue here.

But even a regular *New Scientist* reader, say, should enjoy the many digressions – notably, one on the 11th-century theologian Pietro Damiani who argued, contrary to the conclusions of his contemporary dialecticians, that God could indeed rewrite the past if He so wished.

Toomey is also strong on the mutual relationship between science fiction and the evolving scientific theory – although, typically for a US writer, *Doctor Who* doesn't get a mention despite the enthusiasm of several leading UK researchers for the programme. Still, this is the ideal book for anyone, particularly smart youngsters, who has ever been curious about the potential for adventures in time and space.

Tim Chapman

Fortean Times Verdict
IDEAL INTRO TO TIME TRAVEL DESPITE THE ABSENCE OF DR WHO **8**

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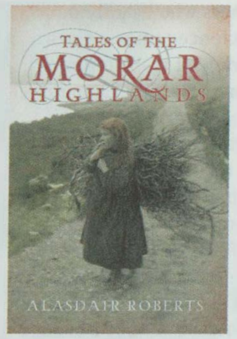
Rough Bounds

A charming and unique survey of the remote 'Highlands of the Highlands'



Tales of the Morar Highlands

Alasdair Roberts

Birlinn Limited
Pb, 176pp, illus, b b, ind, £9.99, ISBN 1841584428
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99

Morar, on the Scottish mainland a little to the south of Skye, is a unique spot. The district forms part of the fabled 'Rough Bounds' – rugged hill country, stretching from Knoydart in the north down to Moidart, so inaccessible that even other Scots once called it "the Highlands of the Highlands". Roads are few, the population minuscule, and the people so resolutely Catholic that "no Protestant minister's sermon was ever heard in the district before the coming of the railway."

It is a land of extremes, home to numerous Munros and to unfathomable lakes. Loch Beoraid, a puddle in a slash between two hills, is about the width of a village pond but 120ft (37m) deep; Loch Morar itself, which plummets to 1,017ft (310m), is the deepest body of water in the British Isles.

Alasdair Roberts, an incomer who now lives at Bracara on Loch Morar's shores, paints an engaging portrait of this remote but gorgeous district. His is an impressionistic work, each chapter tackling a different topic, from the policies of local landlords to the Jacobite rebellion. The historian in me was especially taken with a life of Chirstie MacVarish, a girl born in 1898 and immortalised, at the age of 12, in perhaps the most celebrated photograph ever taken in the Highlands – a snap showing her labouring along a lochside road with a huge bundle of firewood on her back (*left*).

But forteans will for the most part be more interested in Roberts's copious accounts of local folklore.

There is ample coverage here of Morar's legends, from traditions of Prince Charlie's escape from the Redcoats to tales of the Grey Dog of Meoble, a vast spectral deerhound whose appearances herald death for members of the MacDonald family. Here, too, is a half-chapter of coverage of Morag, the monster of Loch Morar, which goes beyond recounting renowned but ancient sightings to summarise more recent cases that never made it to the cryptozoological press. Among these is an unrecorded 1975 land sighting by Donnie Simpson, brother of a famous witness, who was "astonished by a broad body hauling itself over a gravel bar before sinking into the loch". In 1980, the MacKeillag brothers, Alistair and Duncan, saw a three-humped monster while fishing in the mid-part of the loch, and there is even mention of a hitherto unknown photograph, snatched at long distance in the early 1970s by one Ewen Gillies.

Roberts knows about these things thanks to his work as printer for the Morar community newspaper, *West Word*, and, outsider or no, he plainly loves the Morar highlands as much as any local. This is a charming and engaging book, well worth the attention of anyone who has ever fallen under the rugged spell of the Rough Bounds.

Mike Dash

Fortean Times Verdict
LIGHTWEIGHT, BUT THE FOCUS IS UNIQUE **7**

Agent Zigzag

The True Wartime Story of Eddie Chapman

Ben Macintyre

Bloomsbury
Pb, illus, bib, notes, index £7.99, ISBN 9780747592839
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.99

'SUPERB'
AGENT
ZIGZAG
BEN MACINTYRE

Two of the greatest successes of the British war effort were the breaking of the German Enigma codes and the efforts of an innocuous-sounding intelligence department called B1A and a monitoring group known as the 'Twenty Committee'. Thanks to a stream of books, novels and films, the crucial role played by the codebreakers of Bletchley Park is now familiar to most people; the same can't really be said about the operatives of the 'Double Cross' (thus, the 'Twenty' – or 'XX') Committee, but their brilliant track record in capturing and turning enemy spies remains a remarkable achievement, and the double agents they controlled often played a vital role in feeding disinformation to the enemy about Allied operations, including the D-Day landings (see **FT185:38–45**).

Some of these agents, with their bizarre-sounding codenames – Garbo, Snow, Tricycle (whose moniker, it has been said, derived from his preference for three-in-a-bed sex) – have become far better known since the release of their files to the National Archive, and Ben Macintyre's book – drawing on once secret materials released by MI5 since 2001 – fills in the extraordinary details of the life and career of Zigzag. The book brings a figure previously known through a series of somewhat dry intelligence histories (and his own muzzled, misleading memoirs) to gloriously contradictory life.

Agent Zigzag was Eddie Chapman, who deserted from the Coldstream Guards to enjoy a life of crime and relentless womanising in 1930s Soho. He ended up fleeing to Jersey. By the time the Germans occupied the Channel Islands, Eddie was cooling his heels in Jersey Prison; ever the opportunist, he offered his services to the enemy and, by 1941, was undergoing intensive training by the Abwehr in a comfortable mansion near Nantes.

What followed was one of those stories you couldn't make up; parachuted into Britain to sabotage a Mosquito factory, Chapman promptly turned himself in and put his expertise at the service of the British – even offering to assassinate Hitler. His British controllers, once they'd established who he was, didn't know quite what to make of their newest agent – and the ongoing conflict between these establishment mandarins and their criminal charge makes for fascinating reading. Eventually, though, Zigzag was put to good use; an explosion at the De Havilland plant was faked (with the help of 'war magician' Jasper Maskelyne's camouflage section), a stream of disinformation transmitted to the Abwehr, and Zigzag sent back to the grateful Germans, who awarded him the Iron Cross. He was the only British citizen ever to receive Germany's highest symbol of bravery.

This is a wonderful ripping yarn, with the minutiæ of the Double Cross section's work brought vividly to life and its cast of colourful characters as memorable as that of any novel. What's most intriguing, of course, is the enigmatic Zigzag himself; his undoubted bravery always counterbalanced by an eye for the main chance, his strange brand of patriotism by a complete inability to go straight and his sheer love of danger – perhaps the dominant trait in his personality – finding him happier working for his German 'masters' (with whom he enjoyed a far more convivial relationship) than his strait-laced British controllers, who could never quite decide whether he was a traitor or a hero.

Macintyre's account doesn't really go beyond the war years – aside from describing the rather shoddy treatment meted out to him by the British intelligence services – which is a shame, but *Agent Zigzag* is a fascinating account of the shadowy world of wartime counter-intelligence and a damned good read.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
A RIPPING ESPIONAGE YARN FOR BOYS OF ALL AGES **9**

Science fiction round-up

Former Arthur C Clarke Award chairman **David V Barrett**'s quarterly round-up of recent goodies for science fiction and fantasy-loving forteans

Something Borrowed
Paul Magr
Headline
Pb, £11.99, ISBN 9780755332908
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.99

Succubus Blues
Richelle Mead
Bantam
Pb, £6.99, ISBN 9780553818925
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.99

The Court of the Air
Stephen Hunt
Voyager
Pb, £7.99, ISBN 9780007232185
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.99

The Electric Church
Jeff Somers
Orbit
Pb, £9.99, ISBN 9781841496153
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99

Splinter
Adam Roberts
Solaris
Pb, £9.99, ISBN 9781844164905
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99

Barking
Tom Holt
Orbit
Hb, £12.99, ISBN 9781841492858
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.99

The Da-Da-De-Da-Da Code
Robert Rankin
Gollancz
Hb, £14.99, ISBN 9780575070110
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

Something Borrowed
Paul Magrs

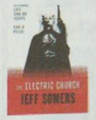
There's something about feisty old ladies. The heroine of Paul Magr's *Something Borrowed* is rather older than the Miss Marple-type she appears to be; suffice to say (without spoiling the plot) that she has a history. When someone starts sending poison pen letters and then bumping people off in Whitby, Brenda gets involved, along with her (normal and elderly) friend Effie, who happens to be a hereditary witch. Then an old flame turns up, from the days when Brenda was maid to one of the Inklings back in 1946. And, of course, this being Whitby, we mustn't forget Dracula. I'll definitely be looking out for the next in this series. Decidedly quirky.

RICHELLE MEAD

In Richelle Mead's *Succubus Blues*, Georgina Kincaid is sexy, cute and *very* experienced. She looks 20-something, but she's actually centuries old. Her job, under the demon hierarchy of Seattle, is to seduce humans in exchange for their souls – you know, the usual sort of trade. But her own love-life is a mess. The wrong sort of guys are forever after her, and she's scared of falling in love because every time she has sex she drains some of the life-force of her lover. And then someone starts killing demons in Seattle, and she's the chief suspect. And then, yup… she falls seriously in love with a human. Ain't life a bitch? It's hardly great literature, and most of the plot twists are foreseeable, but who cares? It's a fun romp.

THE
COURT
OF THE
AIR
STEPHEN HUNT

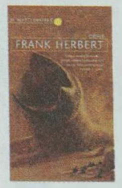
I'm quite a fan of steam-punk, or industrial fantasy, that bastard child of William Gibson and Charles Dickens. Stephen Hunt's *The Court of the Air* has rude mechanicals aplenty, and dark satanic mills (or near equivalent), and some weird and wonderful magic. But it actually has too much; when everything is marvellous, the marvellous becomes mundane, and the plot becomes buried under a welter of extraordinary characters, human and mechanical and all points in between. A shame: I'm sure there was a good story in there somewhere, but I couldn't find it.



The blurb on the back of Jeff Somers's *The Electric Church* is all about "the Monks: cyborgs with human brains", a way of attaining immortality in order "to comprehend the mysteries of the universe" – only you have to die first. It sounds fascinating. The problem is, most of the novel is about a street killer-for-hire in a seedy dystopian near-future where the police are trying to kill him and he kills loads of people and says "fuck" a lot. That's basically the plot. The explanation for the Monks, when we finally get there, is somewhat anti-climactic. A disappointment.

Adam Roberts explains in a lengthy afterword to *Splinter* that this is a 21st-century *homage* to a little-known Jules Verne novel. An asteroid glances off Earth, carrying off a chunk of land with a community of people who had been waiting with their elderly guru for exactly this to happen. There's no explanation for their survival, or gravity, or atmosphere. Almost nothing happens once they've left Earth. It's like one of those films where the characters are trapped in a hotel, but without the gothic *frisson*. Really, it's just a study of the non-relationship between a father who is the most uncharismatic guru imaginable, and his nearly 40-year-old son who has the sexual urges and all the subtlety of a 14-year-old. An experimental novel that doesn't succeed.

With well-known authors like Chris Priest, Stephen Baxter and Greg Bear, Future Classics are Gollancz's latest attempt to give some identity to their backlist – but they look and feel dreadful. They are truly *horrible* designs, mostly on textured card, with no title on the front; they look like cheap pulp editions or tacky bound proofs. I don't think I've ever seen a set of such ugly books. With their decades of experience, Gollancz really should know better.



In contrast, just to show that they *can* get it right, they've brought out a very smart hardback edition of Frank Herbert's genuine classic *Dune* in their excellent SF Masterworks series for only £7.99.

TOM
HOLT
BARKING

Let's finish with a couple of distinctively British humorous novels. First, Tom Holt is a master of parodying the sad grotesqueness of ordinary humdrum life. In *Barking*, Duncan Hughes is a very average lawyer getting grief from his senior partner for not being predatory enough. Then an old friend invites him to join another law firm – and bites him on the neck, turning him into a werewolf. There's another law firm run by vampires (no surprise there), and there's also a very beguiling unicorn who you would not want to meet on a dark night. Delightfully silly in places, yet with an uneasy undercurrent of edgy almost-reality. (If true, it would explain a lot about lawyers…)

ROBERT
RANKIN
THE
DA DA
DE DA DA
CODE

An adult with an opinionated imaginary friend; Robert Johnson's fabled thirtieth song; all those rock singers who died at 27; and the Air Loom Gang. *The Da-Da-De-Da-Da Code* is an amazingly fortean novel. Oh, and it's written by Robert Rankin who, if I hadn't met him, I'd have sworn was fictional – though who could possibly have created him, except himself? There's even a free CD of the soundtrack to the story, performed by Rankin. The novel is set in and around Gunnersbury Park in West London – whose museum is now hosting a fascinating exhibit of the models Rankin has created over the years for his book covers. Read, then go and marvel at Rankin's crazy creativity.

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THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
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Rescue Dawn

Dir Werner Herzog, US 2006

In UK cinemas from 23 November

Werner Herzog's first Hollywood-funded feature is, for him, an unusually straightforward, plot-driven affair. A reworking of his 1997 documentary *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, it tells the true story of Dieter Dengler, a German-born American fighter pilot shot down over Laos during the Vietnam war: captured, tortured and imprisoned, Dengler escaped into the jungle and was eventually rescued. Here, Dengler is played by the consistently interesting Christian Bale, becoming a man who, driven by an overweening desire to fly, embraces the role of all-American hero with all the verve of a foreigner, in a portrait whose nuances might have been more apparent had Bale adopted the German accent Dengler retained throughout his life. Bale is supported by Steve Zahn, who is surprisingly convincing as Duane, a fellow escapee whose mental and physical collapse is faster and more brutal than Dengler's own.

Rescue Dawn is an intense, involving movie: the camera clings to Dengler, forcing the viewer to experience with him the terror inspired by the unintelligible, unpredictable, psychotic natives; the wearing, edgy tedium of the POW camp; the smothering impenetrability of the forest; the squeezing out of all thoughts but staying alive.

The film tells the true story of fighter pilot Dieter Dengler

This imprisoning of the viewer will frustrate many Herzog fans, as the film never breaks away to "ecstatic truth", to that revelation of the vast, brain-wiping bleakness of existence which characterises the director's most powerful films. It is not only the claustrophobia of the cinematography that discourages this kind of epiphany: the landscape is, in typical Herzogian fashion, wired directly to the protagonist's brain, but here it closes in around Dengler rather than opening out into the Alaskan emptiness of *Grizzly Man* or the Amazon of *Aguirre*; and Dengler isn't a visionary megalomaniac of the type immortalised in the crazed raging of Kinski's best creations – his unravelling is contained by a narrow, feral concentration on survival.

Also, troubled young production company Gibraltar Films seem to have tried to straitjacket Herzog into a conventional, low-budget, glossy action flick, while Herzog himself appears to have been distracted by his *Boy's Own* approach to filmmaking – a need for practical challenges and physical hardship which here spills over from behind the camera and threatens to swamp the film. Clearly, departing from a directorial trademark is not necessarily a cause for criticism, but this film constantly feels to be straining for a release it is never allowed, despite Dengler's own escape. *Rescue Dawn*, then, is good rather than great: it consumes you for a while as a film, but doesn't stay with you – like some of Herzog's best works – as existential truth.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
HERZOG'S US FEATURE DEBUT IS GOOD RATHER THAN GREAT **8**

Weirdsville

Dir Allan Moyle, US/Canada 2007

In UK cinemas from 16 November

Dexter (Scott Speedman) and Royce (Wes Bentley) are a couple of junkies forced into selling some gear to pay off their drug debts; Royce's girlfriend and hooker-in-denial (Taryn Manning) ODs on the stash and, presuming her to be dead, they attempt to bury her in the boiler room of a locked drive-in theatre, only for her to come back to life in the middle of a sacrificial ritual performed by a cult of beginner Satanists. The heroes, girlfriend, dealer, Satanists and a gang of mediæval re-enactor dwarves spend the long winter night chasing each other through Weedsville, as the various plot strands weave manically around, occasionally intersecting and just managing to restrain themselves from careering off into complete chaos, before they pull off what all along seems an impossible feat by converging in a fantastically ridiculous finale. The pace is frenetic, the dialogue witty (and among a certain audience, no doubt infinitely quotable), and the characters endearingly and perspicaciously drawn, from more minor figures like the dwarf mall security guard and the pretentious Satanists to the messed-up but hugely sympathetic central trio. The emotional warmth of the film, its strange honesty, and the way the camera shares the protagonists' point of view and intoxication, all serve to draw the viewers in and make us feel we are on their trip with them. But if we are swept along with the sheer joyful exhilaration of it all, this is a trip with a destination, a mythical journey about a hero looking for redemption: the tone is hopeful, the friends – and by extension the viewer, if in an appropriate state of mind – learn something about how to see themselves and the world anew.

Moyle wrote a 10-page manifesto to persuade the film's potential financiers that this wasn't a pro-drug movie; but though the ending is ambiguous, *Weirdsville* is that rare movie brave enough to acknowledge that people take drugs for fun, and it seems clear where Moyle's sympathies lie. Smart, funny, optimistic and high on an alternative worldview, *Weirdsville* is surely destined to be a cult hit amongst students when it comes out on DVD. Plus, it features what is possibly film's most creative use of a garden gnome prop ever.

If you'd like to read an interview with Allan Moyle, go to www.forteantimes.com for an *FT* exclusive.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
CANADA IS WEIRDER AND MORE FUN THAN YOU'D THINK **8**

Silent Light

Dir Carlos Reygadas, Mexico/France/Netherlands/Germany 2007

In UK cinemas from 7 December

For Mexican *auteur* Carlos Reygadas, film is less a narrative tool than a medium through which to convey a particular experience of reality. In *Silent Light*, he shows how it might feel to be a Mennonite farmer, husband and father conducting an affair and seeking the transcendental. A visual and auditory concentration on the minutiæ of everyday life, unrelentingly slow pacing, and de-eroticised sex, are combined with vast landscapes and wonder at characters' undiscoverable inner lives to portray life as it is experienced, the prosaic infused with the ineffable or sublime. While the technically miraculous long takes create tension, the plot does not, and with the lack of dialogue and 'acting' (Reygadas prefers to use non-professionals) the viewer is left not with a sense of having been on a dramatic or emotional journey, but rather with a vague, amorphous impression of the spiritual. Perhaps this *is* what it feels like to be a Mexican Mennonite – the more impatient viewer (*Silent Light* comes in at a very slow 136 minutes) might argue that, if so, despite the beauty of the landscape, their lives must be pretty dull. Or, given the shared themes between this and Reygadas's last film, *Battle in Heaven* – repressed emotions, disconnection, the desire to feel – perhaps it is a more general view of what it is to be human. Showing, not telling, *Silent Light* is a thoughtful and at times awe-inspiring (particularly the virtuoso opening shot of night seeping into morning) use of film, well served by its subject.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
IMPRESSIONISTIC MEDITATION ON SPIRITUAL YEARNINGS **8**

Shrooms

Dir Paddy Breathnach, Ireland 2007

In UK cinemas from 23 November

The internal logic of the horror film is a curious thing: the idea that a bunch of college kids might fly all the way from America to Ireland just to pick some magic mushrooms is stupidly implausible, yet their consequent bloody dispatch makes perfect sense.

That aside, *Shrooms* has some fairly fundamental flaws. Its horror factor is undermined by the fact that we can't linger over the teens' deaths, as we aren't supposed to know whether they're victims of something real or supernatural, or just on one hell of a bad trip. Although the trip doesn't seem *that* bad. The mushrooms should be the crux of the film, and the characters talk about them a lot, but it's soon apparent that people really are dying, and there's little to suggest that they're doing much hallucinating: there's a bit of double vision when looking at trees, and a talking cow, and then the effects seem to wear off. Admittedly, however, this is difficult to establish because the viewpoint keeps shifting, as represented by an æsthetically awkward jumble of looks, mostly *Blair Witch*, Asian Horror and insipidly druggy visuals. All of which precludes audience involvement, as do the vapid, unsympathetic characters (Jack Huston, in particular, is miscast in a role that requires a stronger, more charismatic actor), clichés (forest, *Deliverance*-style inbreds, abandoned institutional building and so on…), and distracting continuity errors.

Despite these irritations, *Shrooms* is a moderately enjoyable film, with some good-looking moments. Had its makers steered clear of derivative genre parody, given their characters some depth, worked up some scares and unified the film with a more hallucinogenic look, it might even have been the psychological thriller they were aiming for.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict
MORE DISORIENTATING DRUNKENNESS THAN TERRIFYING TRIP **5**

BOX SETS

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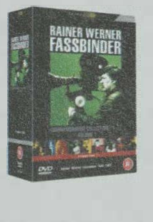
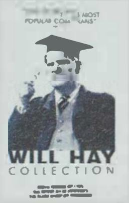
(Arrow Films, £59.99 each)



The chain-smoking, coke-snorting, leather jacketed, homosexual bad boy of New German Cinema finally gets the DVD treatment he deserves with these two magnificent multi-disc sets offering a 17-film selection from his prodigious output (42 features in just 13 years!). The first set covers the period 1969–72, from irritating early pastiches of American noir (as filtered through Godard and Melville) to his first masterpieces like *Beware of a Holy Whore* and *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*; the second, 1973–82 (in fact, it only goes up to 1979 and *The Marriage of Maria Braun* rather than the year of Fassbinder's fatal overdose) and a string of classics. What is now striking is not RWF's frequently provocative subject matter – the plight of outsiders, sexual and social exploitation – but rather the discipline this wildest of directors brought to such varied material: while each of his films is quite different from the others (despite the recurring repertory company in front of the cameras) – ranging from the manic energy of *Satan's Brew* to the icy perfection of *Chinese Roulette* – they all demonstrate a total control of the medium and a powerful thematic unity that reveal Fassbinder as one of the greatest, strangest *auteurs* to emerge from post-war Europe. **David Sutton** **9/10**

WILL HAY COLLECTION

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £29.99)



In the decade before the cosy 'Ealing' formula came to dominate our sense of British comedy, music hall and variety stars provided a quite different model of how the genre might work. In the 1930s, there was no greater exponent of this tradition than Will Hay, who first transplanted his incompetent schoolmaster act from stage to screen and then made a series of films exploiting his natural genius for playing shiftless yet self-important reprobates. This little collection features the beginning and end of the performer's career rather than the glory years of the Gainsborough films. *Radio Parade of 1935* (1934) sees Hay as the director of the aptly named NBG radio station, whose incomprehensible programmes, with their aim of "gently educating the masses", are a transparent dig at Reith's staid BBC. Hay ended his career, oddly enough, at Ealing, where in *The Ghost of St Michael's* (1940) he again dons the mortarboard in a *Scooby Doo*-like tale and *The Black Sheep of Whitehall* (1941) teams him with John Mills on the track of Nazi spies. While one is hugely grateful to see these films on DVD, a full set of Hay's Ealing work would have made a far more coherent release. **DS** **7/10**

ALASTAIR SIM COLLECTION

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £34.99)

ALASTAIR SIM
COLLECTION

A comic actor, rather than a comedian, Alastair Sim was one of those rare geniuses who lit up any and every scene in which he appeared. Highlights of this five-film collection of his 1950s work include the neglected *Folly to be Wise*, featuring Sim as a well-meaning army chaplain whose idea for a camp 'Brains Trust' unleashes disaster; and *The Green Man*, a dark and hilarious farce pitting Sim's mild-mannered professional assassin against a bumbling vacuum cleaner salesman called William Blake (George Cole). *Laughter in Paradise* and *Left, Right and Centre* are good lesser comedies while the sentimental *Geordie* is out of place here. Sim remains wonderfully funny, a genuinely subtle actor who can achieve more with a nervous smile or a raised eyebrow than most thesps do with major histrionics. **DS** **8/10**

The Orange Box

PC, Xbox 360, Playstation 3 £34.99/£49.99/£49.99
EA/Valve

The Orange Box may well be the greatest software bargain of all time – five fantastic games, three of which are brand new, on one disk, for the price of a normal game!

Inside the tangerine-tinged case, you'll find the following: *Half Life 2*, *Half Life 2: Episode One* and *Half Life 2: Episode 2*, online shooter *Team Fortress 2*, and my very favourite game, *Portal*.

The genesis of *Portal* is pretty unusual in itself: the idea for the game was originally conceived by a group of university students for their final project. At the end of the year, the university held a fair where developers from around the country could come and look at the games the students had produced. After setting eyes on this particular game and immediately seeing its strong potential, Valve MD Gabe Newell gave the entire team contracts. And so, *Portal* was born.

The gameplay in *Portal* is probably best likened to finding yourself trapped inside an MC Escher painting. As you pass through each 'test chamber', you'll be required to solve an increasing number of seemingly impossible puzzles in order to reach the exit. But there's an interesting twist – you possess a gun that can paint portals anywhere in the room. Need to reach an incredibly high ledge? No problem, simply shoot a portal above the ledge, and one below your feet, and you'll instantly be teleported to the other side of the room. It takes some time getting used to, and by the time you get to the final levels, you'll really need to think hard about the physics behind each move you make; but the game is fantastic, and, although short, it's definitely a classic.

But while *Portal* is by far my stand-out favourite in this set, it's certainly not the only great game contained here. *Half-Life 2* looks incredible running on the Xbox 360, without a hint of slowdown, and, along with *Episode One*, will help bring you up to speed with the *Half-Life* story, which has more conspiracies than you'd find in a Michael Moore film. *Episode Two*, on the other hand, is yet another terrific new instalment in the *Half Life* series, with expansive new environments, new enemies to face, and a gripping storyline to keep you playing.

However, it isn't all good news for *The Orange Box*, as *Team Fortress 2* is the weakest link in the chain. An online-only shooter, which is plagued by some crippling lag, *TF2* would have been a much better game if the Net code had been better optimised. If you can find a good server, you'll be away, but I found that nine times out of 10 my games would be ruined by lag. Sort it out, Valve!

Still, with four excellent games, and one that's good-but-could-be-great depending on the server you play on, The Orange Box is a must-buy for any gamer. As Meatloaf would have said if he'd needed a different rhyme: four out of five ain't bad.

Ian Morris

Fortean Times Verdict
FORGET HALO 3 – THIS IS THE GAME OF THE YEAR **9**

Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria

PS2 #£29.99 Square Enix/Tri-Ace

After the triumph that was *Final Fantasy XII*, Squaresoft bring us their latest RPG, and, frankly, it's a very strange one indeed.

It revolves around a tale of Valkyries on the run from Norse gods – which comes across as more than a little surreal, particularly as the characters have Norse-sounding names, look like typical Manga characters and speak with American accents.

The game itself is terribly linear, with interminably long and far too frequent cut scenes – including one at the beginning that, while quite glorious, outstays its welcome by a good three or four minutes.

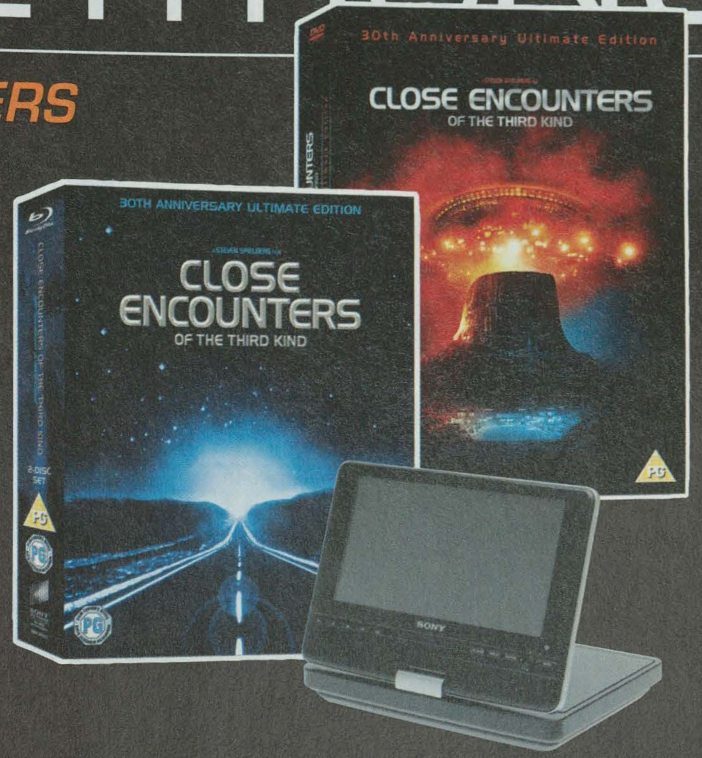
The main problem, though, is that there's not actually much for the player to do, other than engage in repetitive fights and run around in a strangely old-fashioned 2D environment to the accompaniment of the most dreadful music I've ever heard in a game; to give you some idea, it sounds like some late 1980s arcade machine on attract mode. Meanwhile, the fighting system, while trying to be innovative, requires nothing more than button-bashing and the most basic of tactics.

But, even with all these problems, the game has a mysterious *something*. Despite not really 'enjoying' playing, I found myself drawn back into it again and again (if with the sound turned down), unable to quite explain the game's bizarre hold on me.

Richmond Clements

Fortean Times Verdict
ANNOYING, OLD FASHIONED, BUT HORRIBLY COMPULSIVE **5**

COMPETITIONS



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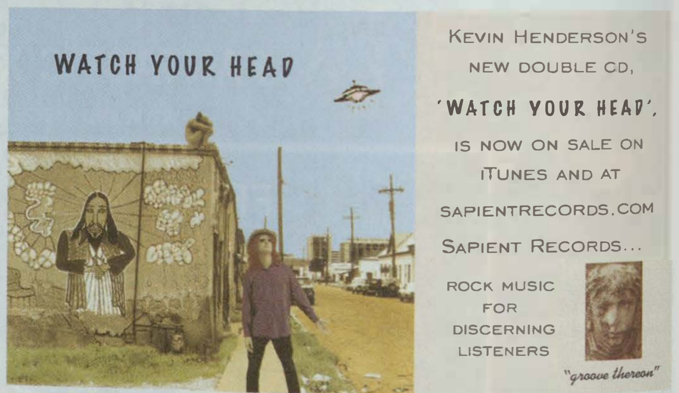
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Dear FT...

letters

The Lost Room

I always read your reviews avidly, but I have to say I am very disappointed with the 6/10 you gave *The Lost Room* [**FT228:67**]. Its plot is perfectly fortean, brilliantly weird, excruciatingly suspenseful, and shows that you don't need a massive budget to make top quality TV. I have recommended it to everyone I know, and even on my grumpiest of days would award it at least 8/10, and given it more than a short paragraph review in the hope that a sequel be made, or at least more wildly original programmes like this be commissioned!

Tabitha Arnesen
By email

Gut scepticism

Responding to my letter about Channel 4's 'Great Global Warming Swindle' [**FT228:76**], Piers Locke accuses me of uncritical acceptance of anti-manmade global warming (MMGW) arguments [**FT225:73**]. He bases this solely upon my brief admittance of my scepticism, but nowhere throughout the letter do I elaborate on it and I think it was rather obvious that the point of my letter was to reflect how "the scientific times they are a-changin'". He uses this absence of critical comments on the views expressed in the programme as another sign of my poor judgement, but I thought my comment that this was sensationalist TV was a clear hint that I hadn't accepted its content uncritically. This attack upon my 'scepticism' is more revealing about his views than mine, and I get the feeling that, for him, scepticism of MMGW is synonymous with being in error.

Although I have objections on MMGW, my doubts are informed by a deeper socio-political perspective on how 'truths' are arrived at in society. And in the 'Swindle' programme one point rang true, which was that pro-MMGW-orientated research gets funding and creates the illusion of a solid consensus. What these scientists are complaining about is nothing new, and of course they didn't mention that this 'funding bias' equally applies in the opposite direction. The history of scientific thinking has been dogged by the awkward tension between the old and new guard, but as I said the times have changed and this dynamic balance has been upset by an increasingly shrieking media amplifying the zealousness of a youthful eco-science. It's all a bit too fevered and quick for my liking and seems driven by an attempt to fill the vacuum left behind due to the collapse of belief in, and respect for, the old scientific establishment and experts in general.

I have been accused of being a faulty fortean, and maybe I am wrong. Perhaps it's cussedness on my part that when everybody starts shouting and pointing in one direction I feel the desire to look the other way.

Clive Gee
By email

Exploding Henry

Re "Mythconceptions 113 [**FT226:15**]: as a scholar of Reformation literature and history, I've heard many versions of the story of the exploding corpse of Henry VIII. The closest thing to the truth comes to us via pieced-together accounts from the 18th and 19th centuries, when the crypt was opened to admit other royal residents. The corpse itself did not explode, but the coffin did. Lead coffins typically explode – albeit in slow motion – because of the gases released by a decomposing corpse of any size. The seams of the coffin were observed to have "blown outward", and one of the wooden blocks on which the coffin had stood rotted away, causing the coffin, and its contents, to fall over. The king's bones were thrown askew, but remained mostly in the coffin. The scene must have looked like an explosion took place. None of the accounts mention any effort to straighten out the bones or set the coffin upright again.

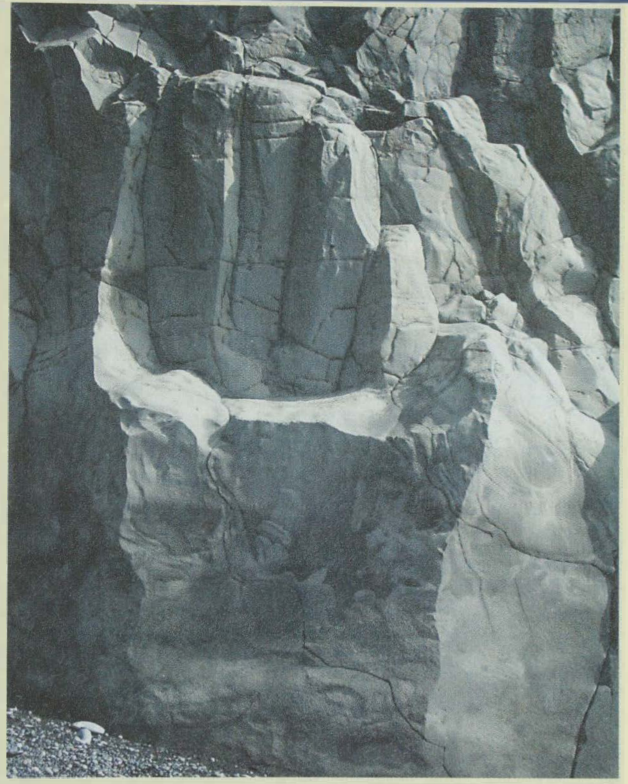
Dr Thea Cervone
Lecturer in English,
University of Southern California

Rabbipigs

In reaction to the article by David Hambling about hybrids [**FT228:14–15**]: many years ago we had a guinea pig whose sex was at that point undetermined, and a male dwarf rabbit. Both were getting along really well, seeking each other out when they were walking free, so we decided to put them in the same cage. To our amazement, we found five little somethings in the cage one day. Being familiar with offspring of both rabbits and guinea pigs, it was clear these beasties didn't look like either. They were naked, blind, with bigger ears than a guinea pig, and their shapes were a mixture of both mom and dad. Only two of them were barely alive. Not one of them made it. Regrettably we never even thought of taking pictures. Maybe true rodent love can conquer the genetic barrier...

Loes Modderman
The Netherlands

Simulacra Corner



Krista Kendall of Arlington, Virginia, recently took this photo of a "hand" in a cliff face on the beach near Vik, Iceland.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll give you six months of *FT*s free for any we use.

Nikola Tesla

Name that train

In his article on Nikola Tesla [**FT217:32–39**], Mark Pilkington writes that "an engine on Silverlink's North London Line was named the Nikola Tesla in 2001." There is a story behind the naming that should be told.

Percy Drummond (above), a fellow engine-driver at Watford Junction, a co-founder of South Hertfordshire UFO Investigation Group (now sadly defunct) and lifelong follower of all things fortean, had from the times of British Rail asked that an electric loco be named after the inventor of the electric motor – to no avail.

It has become a custom for drivers retiring after 50 years' service to be granted the honour of having a three-car unit named after them. When Percy was called to the area manager's office to be informed of this accolade, he replied: "I would love to see my name on a unit, but would be even more delighted to see Nikola Tesla in my place."

The naming ceremony took place on platform one at Watford Junction at noon on 31 August 2001. Percy drove "his" unit to Kilburn High Road, where he was relieved, to ride back in the train with the invited guests. Refreshments were served *en route*. Greater love hath no man, to forego an opportunity to go down in railway history. As he is too modest to tell the tale himself, I write for him.

Dennis Redrup
Watford, Hertfordshire (FT subscriber since the first issue).

Clown evolution

As a small child growing up in Nashville, Tennessee, in the 1960s, I was regularly spellbound by the *Bozo the Clown Show*. Bozo seemed like a miraculous, otherworldly being, since nothing on the show or in my immediate surroundings suggested Bozo was merely "just a man in makeup and a funny suit". Noting my interest, my parents took me to the see the Barnum & Bailey Circus, where I saw other fine and acrobatically talented examples of clownhood. Thus I was a bit dismayed to read the recent articles on coulrophobia [**FT226:24–41**] and the letters that resulted [**FT228:74–75**]. Two points have come to mind.

The first is that the clowns Americans of my generation grew up watching on television, in 'Golden Age' Hollywood films, and at the circus were products of the 'high period' of mid-century American and European culture. Their makeup, costumes, performance, and behaviour were usually exemplary at all times, and they remained tightly locked into their roles whenever in costume.

Except for the hobo clown, whose makeup left some parts of the face bare, the clowns I personally observed weren't obviously just human beings in disguise: via their professionalism and the slick application of their total-face makeup, they appeared actually to be transcendent "demigods of the sawdust", entirely removed from the rest of mankind. They were friendly, playful and amusing, not frightening, to me and the other children I knew, though shyness towards them was often a child's first response when encountering them in person (fair enough; most children experience the same reaction to shopping mall Santa Clauses and employees in character costumes at theme parks). Taschen's *1000 Clowns, More or Less* (2004) devotes 287 pages to the 'high clowns' of this era. However, the looser, more 'natural' styles of the late 1960s and the 1970s seem to have shattered the hard, shiny surface of the American clown. I found the clowns I saw in film, television, and at local parades and parties in the 1970s both degenerate and amateur to a fairly shocking degree.

That was what was frightening – suddenly the white-faced clowns had dark beard stubble growing through their makeup, the makeup itself was incomplete, very poorly designed and applied, and any loud or badly designed piece of clothing could pass, in conjunction with other such pieces, as a clown costume. These 'clowns' often seemed like tacky, delusional men and women romping intrusively about like coarse and drunken fools. They were both unfunny and embarrassing to watch, and few wanted to interact with them. What parent wouldn't instinctively place a protective arm around their child at the approach of such a grotesque and misguided, but clearly human, stranger? As I see it, it is this 'degenerate' sort of clown that has given rise to many or most cases of coulrophobia.

My second thought is actually an observation: it has become increasingly common for the average American man or woman to say "I find them terrifying!" almost automatically whenever the subject of clowns is raised. Often such a statement is followed by a short and wholly unconvincing anecdote, which has the character of the blandest sort of urban legend, about an unpleasant clown episode in the speaker's childhood.

I don't know if these declarations arise from the influence of novels like Stephen King's *It*, 40 years of degenerate clowns, both, or something else, but in my direct experience, in almost every case, the statements come across as glib, superficial, knee-jerk responses. Additionally, I've often received the impression that the speakers, though earnest, believe they're confiding something that is simultaneously original, "edgy", "radical", and even "slightly forbidden". Nothing could be further from the case today. Whatever the reasons, I'd guess that, if asked today, most people, especially those under 40, would claim they find clowns "really frightening". It seems to have become the thing to do.

Joseph Barnes
By email

Patrick Walker's letter [**FT228:75**] mentions several examples of Evil Clowns on screen – but perhaps the most disturbing addition to the "Killer Clown" film genre is Victor Salva's *Clownhouse* (1990). The movie's plot concerns three young brothers who find themselves alone in an old house and pursued by three escaped mental patients who have murdered three travelling circus clowns and assumed their clown identities (exploitation fans may recall a similar plot from a British slasher, *Killer's Moon* (1978) directed by Alan Birkinshaw).

What makes *Clownhouse* all the more disturbing is that director Salva was subsequently found guilty on five counts of sex abuse involving the film's 12-year-old child star, Nathan Winters, who was forced into an oral sex act that Salva filmed with a videocam. Despite serving 15 months of a three-year jail sentence (completing parole in 1992, according to the state Corrections Department and court records in Contra Costa County) and being registered as a sex offender in Los Angeles County, Salva has successfully resurrected his film career with hits such as *Powder* (1995), *Jeepers Creepers* (2001) and its 2003 sequel, and the recent *Peaceful Warrior* (2006).

Further Clown horror films also include Kevin Kangas's *Fear of Clowns* (2004) in which an artist with coulrophobia is stalked by a murderous clown whom she has painted, and Bryan Johnson's *Vulgar* (2001) a rape revenge thriller with a difference.

Carl Ford
Twickenham, Middlesex

Humphrey's "stitch-up"

I was interested to read Guy Lyon Playfair's article on research grants for paranormal investigation, and the subsequent letters it provoked [**FT224:58–59, 226:76, 227:74**]. In fact, his case is ably made by a recent recipient of one of those grants, Nicholas Humphrey, who explains on his website (www.humphrey.org.uk/Papers/2002BeholdTheMan.pdf) how it came about:

"A few years ago, I had the good fortune to be offered a rather attractive fellowship in Cambridge: a newly established Research Fellowship, where – I was led to understand – I would be allowed to do more or less whatever I wanted. But there was a catch. The money for this fellowship was coming from the 'Perrott and Warrick Fund', administered by Trinity College. Mr Perrott and Mr Warrick, I soon discovered, were two members of the British Society for Psychical Research who in the 1930s had set up a fund at Trinity with somewhat peculiar terms of reference. Specifically, the fund was meant to promote: 'the investigation of mental or physical phenomena which seem to suggest (a) the existence of supernormal powers of cognition or action in human beings in their present life, or (b) the persistence of the human mind after bodily death.'

"Now, the trustees of the fund had been trying, for 60 years, to find worthy causes to which to give this money. They had grudgingly given out small grants here and there. But they could find hardly a single project they thought academically respectable. Indeed it sometimes seemed that the very fact that anyone applied for a grant in this area was enough to disqualify them from being given it. Meanwhile, the fund with its accruing interest grew larger and larger, swelling from an initial £50,000 to well over a million. Something had to be done.

"Eventually the decision was made to pay for a Senior Research Fellowship at Darwin College (not at Trinity) in the general area of parapsychology and philosophy of mind, without any specific limitations. The job was advertised. I was approached by friends on the committee who knew of my outspoken scepticism about the paranormal. And – to cut a long story short – in what was something of a stitch-up I was told the job was mine on the understanding that I would do something sensible and not besmirch the good name of the College by dabbling in the occult or entertaining 'spooks and ectoplasm'."

It is disarmingly honest of Humphrey to admit the 'stitch-up'; more questionable is his willingness to take the money in such equivocal circumstances, and in such evident bad faith – "my outspoken scepticism of the paranormal". And the committee's understanding of the paranormal as "spooks and ectoplasm" would be laughable if it had not got £1 million in its bank account.

What is most striking (or perhaps most predictable) is that at no time does the spirit of true scientific enquiry trouble either him, the committee or the trustees. He is concerned only to affirm his devout belief in the impossibility of the 'paranormal'.

Those outside institutional science might agree with him that it is rather too Herculean a task – particularly for a paid stooge – to reduce the 'paranormal' to the terms of reality accepted by orthodox scientific materialism, when by definition it refutes them. Could it be that Mr Perrott and Mr Warrick were hopeless ideologues and that the visible and invisible worlds, so thoroughly separated in post-Cartesian Western society, shall never meet again?

Yet the fortean reader prepared to plough on through Humphrey's paper will be rewarded by discovering something delightful within this most unpromising material, perhaps the very thing that Messrs Warrick and Perrott hoped for – an illumination of the relationship between scientific materialism and the 'paranormal', or to use a philosophically extended term, the 'daimonic'.

The daimonic world shadows the Apollonian clarity of Western orthodox science, subverting it, annoying it – indeed enraging it. It is a guerrilla movement, inglorious and ineradicable. But Humphrey is unaware of the insurgency in his own writing, it seems, for he introduces the guerrillas despite himself. It is in the course of a section denouncing Jesus's miracles as conjuring tricks, that something remarkable swims into his mind – the memory of a time when he was interested in scientific experiment – when he was a six-year-old boy:

"[...] Suppose, then, that one day it were to have come about that Jesus discovered, to his own surprise, that his experiments to test his powers had the desired effect without his using any sort of trick at all! What might he have made of it then?

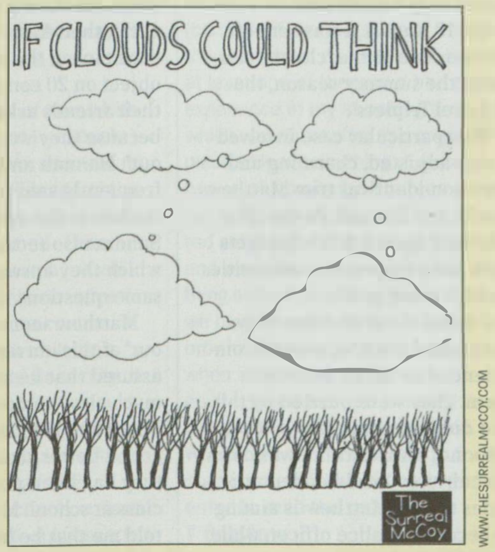
"I speak from some experience of these matters (and surely some of you have had similar experiences too). Not, I should say, the experience of deliberately cheating (at least no more than anyone else), but rather of discovering as a child that certain of my own experimental 'try-ons' were successful when I least expected it.

"For example, when I was about six years old I invented the game of there being a magic tree on Hampstead Heath, about half a mile from where we lived in London. Every few days I used to visit the tree, imagining to myself 'what if the fairies have left sweets there?'. Sometimes I would say elaborate spells as I walked over there, although I would have felt a fool if anyone had heard me. Yet, remarkably, not long after I began these visits, my spells began to work. Time after time I found toffees in the hollow of the tree trunk... Draw your own conclusions..."

One conclusion we might draw from this clearly repeatable experiment is that fairies exist.

One question we might ask is what happened to that intuitive, imaginative child to make him, as an adult, espouse a view that denies the authority of his own early experience – an experience that he believes is common among children? Daimonic reality exists in the real world of personal experience and interpretation, and can sometimes be summoned in the way the six-year-old Nicholas did, bravely and out loud. What made Humphrey subsequently so timid? For mortally afraid he surely is: "If the 38 laws of nature were to be adjusted to allow for paranormal phenomena, this too would have disastrous consequences for human beings, fatally compromising their individuality and creativity and undermining the basis of biological and cultural progress. It would not only be the end of life as we know it, but very possibly enough to prevent life ever having started."

Merrily Harpur
By email



letters

Turkish travels

I received *Fortean Times* No. 220 just days before I left on a long-planned, month-long trip to Turkey. Naturally, I turned first to the article by Sean Thomas about Gobekli Tepe. I was already hiring a guide to take me to Sanliurfa and Harran and added Gobekli Tepe to my itinerary; unfortunately, the site was closed for the season. All the bas-reliefs were covered, but the flints mentioned on pages 46 and 50 were out in plain sight, and being able to handle these was one of the highlights of my trip.

I carried **FT220** with me, but didn't actually get to read it until I returned. That's when I realised I'd encountered further Turkish forteana. For example, the dog my Turkish friend Kursad saw on the ferry from the European side of Istanbul (Galata) to Haydarpasa Station on the Asian side. Kursad asked a boathand who the dog belonged to, and was told that he routinely took the ferry from one side of Istanbul to the other, all by himself. He would fit right in with the dogs in "Station to Station" [**FT220:6–7**].

Finally, I bought a very expensive and deliciously bitter jar of honey from a vendor in the Moda district of Istanbul (Asian side). This honey was made from bees that had pollinated chestnut trees. The seller warned me not to eat more than a tablespoon a day, something about low blood pressure. I didn't really get it until I read the short about Mad Honey Disease [**FT220:14**]. I haven't touched it since.

Here is a photo of a billboard outside the UFO Museum in Goreme, in the Cappadocia region of Turkey. I tried many times to get inside, but it was always closed. I'm just glad it exists.

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Fred Nocella
San Rafael, California

Twin tales

I thought you might be vaguely diverted to hear of a case of "I'm-not-sure-what" that happened to me lately. It could be a double-decker coincidence, or a case of polysynchronicity, or… you decide. To me, it seems like a soap opera plot based on Young's 'double-slit' experiment.

In my day job, I am a reporter for regional newspaper *Bedfordshire on Sunday*. I would like to say that by night I fight crime while dressed in a blue leotard with red underpants, but that would only be half true.

On 17 August, I was sent off to cover one of the 'classic' stories of the summer season, the 'A-Level Triplets'.

This particular case involved a well-adjusted, charming and very non-identical trio: Matthew, David and Hannah Payne (18), who had agreed A-level targets with their respective universities and hit every grade.

I asked them whether they ever found other apparent 'coincidences' or 'links' between them. They were puzzled by this and didn't seem to know how to respond, which I think was down to their very level-headed attitudes to life. Matthew is aiming to become a police officer, while David is studying economics and Hannah history. Hannah eventually said that all three had passed their driving tests within six weeks of each other, each with the same instructor and being marked down for the same observational fault.

A little more probing (sometimes prompted by their mother Sandra) provided the following anecdote: David and Hannah were once tested for telepathy by some friends. This involved them simultaneously selecting and indicating (without speaking) one object from a choice of three, all the while unable to see each other. After the two had each picked the same (varying) object on 20 consecutive 'tries', their friends asked them to stop because they were 'freaking us out'. Hannah and David also frequently said the same thing in class at the same moment, and Sandra also recalled an exam in which they answered exactly the same questions right and wrong.

Matthew seemed to be 'left out' of this narrative, but I was assured that he and Hannah were much closer emotionally than David and Hannah, who simply got on better socially because they had been put in the same class at school. Matthew also told me that he had tried the same telepathy test as Hannah and David, but 'it didn't work'. I found this an interesting insight.

The thing that impressed me about the triplets (a label they hate, incidentally) was the fact that they were plainly not that interested in the 'coincidence' angle, and that it took some prompting to get them to relate any kind of anecdote, none of which they took all that seriously when they could remember them. I wonder what they might have remembered if they were given more time.

I hadn't been back in the office an hour when an absent colleague's phone rang with an internal call and I picked it up at random.

The call was from our downstairs reception, telling me that there was someone here with a possible story. I muttered to myself and traipsed downstairs – only to find myself face to face with a monozygotic identical twin who had written a published book about clairvoyance.

Philip Kinsella, 38, was led to clairvoyance after what he described as a 'visit' from a dead friend, and attended Spiritualist churches before striking out on his own. He lives with his brother Ronald, and the two (who also work at the local branch of Debenhams) had also co-authored and illustrated a published children's book. It was called *The Rock Bottom Twins* and they described it as 'an act of desperation' as it had been the 700th (!) manuscript they had submitted to various publishers. I thought it impolite to ask whether the title was self-conscious. They based their story on a shared daydream: the lead characters are identical twins, who own a domestic robot (with consequent calamities). When I met both twins later, I asked whether their title was a deliberate quasi-acrostic of the words 'The Robot' (or possibly even 'The Robot Twins') and they were amazed at this apparent signal from their unconscious.

The acceptance letter for the children's book had arrived on 30 November and the acceptance letter for the clairvoyance book had arrived (from a separate publisher) on 1 December. The children's book was accepted by Pegasus publishing (named after a flying horse) and the clairvoyance book by Capal Bann Publishing (Capal Bann being Celtic for 'white horse').

By this time, I was in need of a double (or treble) down the White Horse, myself…

Garrick Alder
Senior reporter,
Bedfordshire on Sunday

it happened to me...

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SOPHIE CHERY

Pixilation

The letters on 'pixilation' [**FT219:72**] – the unexplained removal and return of objects – prompt me to write about my experiences of this phenomenon. I am a 36-year-old married pawnbroker, quite down-to-earth. In our business, we have a wide selection of jewellery, and we do weekly category checks for stock control purposes. In some of the larger categories, we need to locate and identify up to several hundred items. There are always five or six that prove elusive. Other staff members join the search, which usually locates the remaining items save for one or two. You can only check the same shelves, drawers, and cabinets so many times before you give up, go mad, or – as I do – ask the fairies politely to replace the item.

At first, I did this as a fortean jest, not expecting a result; but how many times does this approach have to work before the evidence leads to an admittedly unlikely acceptance of the phenomenon? I have found that certain procedures need to be followed when seeking help. The request has to be spoken clearly in a tone recognising the playfulness with which the items were removed. I have found the guilty parties to be unfailingly compliant. Typically, an item of jewellery three people have been looking for over several days turns up in a place we had all checked previously.

Richard Tomkinson
By fax

At about midday today [29 Dec 2006], I was standing at a bus stop in Oatland Lane, Leeds. It was raining hard, and as there was no shelter, I was trying to control my umbrella in the gusty wind. Suddenly, an enormously strong gust blew my cap off, and while trying to control my umbrella I turned and saw it disappearing over a grassy knoll behind and to my right. The rain was lessening, so I lowered my umbrella and went in search of my cap by some houses. There were few people about, and I was conscious of the bus stop, checking frequently, as I didn't want to miss my bus.

Not finding my cap, and upset at losing it, I returned to the bus stop, the wind still blowing in my face. I was astonished to find my cap next to the bus stop in the very place that I'd been standing a few minutes earlier. If someone had seen the incident and found my cap, why didn't they hand it to me, rather than put it where it could blow away again? Would the wind have returned it to the exact spot? Has anyone had a similar experience?

Diana Lyons
Sheepscar, West Yorkshire

In response to recent letters in *FT* about lost items and how to get them back (curiously, the issue that last featured this topic has gone missing from my 10-year collection) – I have a related theory that Found Objects will always disappear again eventually. I can cite several examples of this.

Walking back from taking my children to school some years ago, I found a cardigan lying on the pavement. My size but not my colour (grey), it could have been part of the local senior school's uniform. I duly advertised it around to no avail and decided to keep it, if only for gardening or walking in the country. I used it for this purpose for several years until out walking one day in fields at Shirley near Ashbourne, a few miles from home, when I took it off and slung it over my bag. A few yards further on, I realised it had gone. I must have dropped it. But there was no sign of it on the footpath, which I could see for some distance. I walked back the length of a couple of fields, but never found it. There were no people, dogs, or omnivorous livestock in sight.

Around the same time, one of my daughters found a pen down the back seat of a bus during a school trip to London. It looked quite ordinary, but on wiping off a heavy patina of dirt I realised it was actually a very expensive pen – a Parker, as I recall, in a lapis-lazuli coloured casing, with a gold nib and clip. It was duly refurbished and served my daughter as her 'lucky' pen through school exams and degree work for six or seven years. About the time she got her degree, the pen vanished, never to be seen again.

So, is there some magical way these objects re-find their original owners? (Perhaps they use some of the methods described in *FT*.) Or do they simply move on to some ethereal Lost Property Office in the sky?

Equally perplexing but slightly spookier is the case of Things You Can't Get Rid Of. On several occasions, I have had an object in the house that I don't want or don't like, have given it or thrown it away, only to find it back more or less where it had been in the house a short time afterwards. Very often, these items are books, usually ones bought from charity shops that I didn't particularly want to read again – or, occasionally, items of vintage clothing or costume jewellery, which came from similar venues. This is irritating, if not particularly disturbing.

However, a couple of items with a homing instinct that I seriously tried to get rid of really spooked me out. One was a small image of the Indian god Juggernath, after whom the juggernaut is named. This one was a tiny image in a matchbox-sized plastic container, given to us by a South Indian couple my husband had met while on a course at Nottingham University. It was slightly fearsome-looking and I was never very keen on it. Since it wasn't a deity in popular culture in my husband's part of India, it eventually went in a charity collection bag, from which it duly escaped and reappeared in a drawer shortly afterwards. It was probably at the third attempt that it finally left us, when I personally took it in a bag with other objects to the Oxfam shop after asking it very nicely not to come back.

Spookier still was a jointed metallic doll that surfaced in a pin tray on my mother's dressing table, which nobody could either identify or remember having acquired. It was about 2in (5cm) long, made of some heavy coppery-silvery metal and had a disproportionately large oval head with slit eyes, tiny mouth and no nose at all. On reflection, it did look rather like what people now think of as a "Grey", but this was in the late 1960s or early 1970s when I don't recall having heard of such things. It was about the size of something that might have come out of a cracker, but seemed much too heavy and too scary for that. It had a particularly menacing air, and my mother thought she'd got rid of it several times, but somehow it always reappeared. Eventually, when the house was being sold and my mother moved elsewhere, I found it yet again on the dressing table and put it in a charity collection bag wrapped considerately in a clean handkerchief, once more asking it politely and respectfully not to come back. As far as I know, it never did.

Brenda Ray
Mickleover, Derbyshire

Many years ago, our household was troubled by what I chose to call "the fairies". Without really believing in them, I knew they didn't care to move anything heavier than a key or two, that there were two of them (because if we had three of anything they always let us keep one) and that at least one of them had had a nasty experience in my shopping bag, which was thereafter the only safe place to leave anything. Eventually, two small homemade purses (black felt lined with Irish green and with red stitching) disappeared together and were never seen again, but everything stayed put after that. I think we have all read about the elves or brownies who went away long ago when some housewife made them each a green suit, so possibly they thought they had been rumbled. Would other sufferers care to try the same remedy? I would be very interested to read the result.

T Barstow
No address

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

52. The Shell Grotto, Margate

MARY DERRIMAN ventures beneath the streets of the seaside resort of Margate, Kent, and uncovers a little-known and mysterious structure: prehistoric pagan site, Mithraic temple or Regency folly?

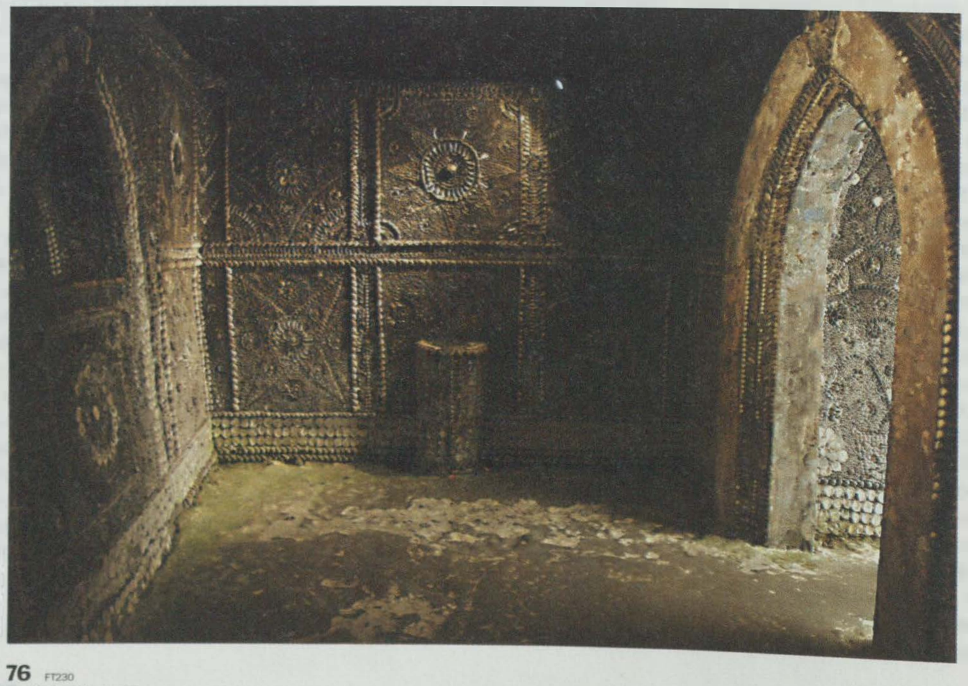
For most people, the name of Margate probably conjures up images of donkeys on the sands and the Dreamland amusement park, and not a mysterious and possibly very ancient site. Yet some feel this particular site should be ranked with the Seven Wonders of the World.

Margate, in East Kent, was one of Britain's first seaside holiday resorts, and is often claimed as the first to provide bathing machines, donkey rides and deck chairs. It was also a notorious haunt of smugglers, and many people have visited the famous man-made caves cut into the limestone and popularly believed to be their cache (at least before the caves were recently closed due to subsidence). The curious may also have seen marked on the map something called 'The Shell Grotto', but most don't bother to investigate any further, probably because the name suggests, at best, a rather tame 19th-century folly.

But if you do make your way up Grotto Hill, pay your entrance fee and walk through the gift shop (where you will be given a plan) into the man-made passage, you are in for a unique experience.

This is another world – everywhere you look there are intricate patterns constructed from, literally, millions of shells set in some form of concrete. It must have been a truly monumental project, unlikely to have been done purely for the fun of it.

The entrance leads to what is termed a rotunda, where it branches around a central pillar to converge under a dome open to the sky; a serpentine passage then leads to a rectangular 'altar' chamber containing a recess, which certainly gives the impression of an altar, and, to one side, a pedestal which may have held a statue. A headless figurine holding a cup used to be over the passage entrance. The ceiling of this chamber was in bad repair when it was discovered , but had clearly been arched without any supporting pillars. Originally, the grotto had only a very small and narrow entrance; the current modern one – some 68ft (21m) long and aligned north and south – was added later.

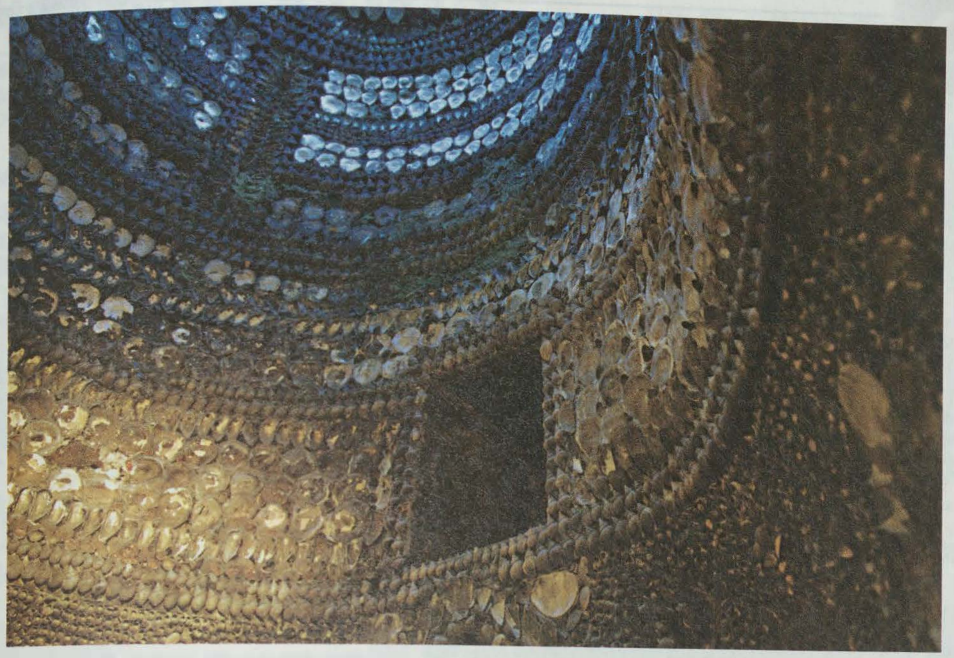

COLIN BOWLING

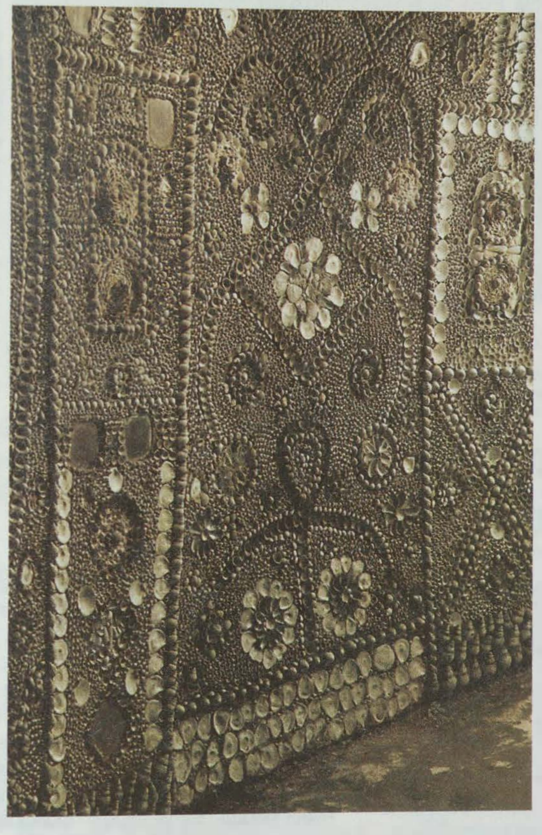
The site was first discovered in 1835 in the grounds of a school, when it is said a workman's spade fell though into a hole, at first thought to be a well. The schoolmaster's son was lowered down to retrieve the spade; on returning to the surface he reported the incredible sight that had greeted him. His father, Mr Newlove, had the foresight to purchase the freehold and open up the entrance; at least that's the official story. The present owner, Sarah Vickery, thinks it more likely that Mr Newlove's children had already found the (then) very narrow entrance (or had pushed aside a stone covering the dome) and had actually been playing in the Grotto for some time.

The discovery did not cause the sort of stir that one might have expected and was hardly mentioned in the newspapers of the time. One imagines that such a find – if it had happened anywhere but Margate – would have created as much fuss as the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb, but there's little evidence of any real interest being taken.[1] Could Mr Newlove have deliberately hushed it up? He was certainly quick to see the site's potential and buy up the land. Did he perhaps find more in the long-hidden Grotto than he admitted? He does seem to have prospered after its discovery. The site was opened to visitors in 1837, its serpentine passages having been illuminated by gas lamps.

Even today, the site remains virtually unknown. In a brief television slot on Anglia TV, it warranted only a few moments airtime, squeezed alongside the Tiptree jam factory and Whitstable oysters. In the programme, Sarah Vickery told the viewers that she had loved the Grotto as a child, had been thrilled when she saw the site up for sale in a local estate agent's office, and that she had become the proud owner of this neglected national treasure.

The origins of such a remarkable place would, one might think, warrant further investigation, yet little seems to have been done in this direction. There havc, however, been a good many speculations. Howard Bridgewater in *The Grotto* puts forward the theory that it is a Mithraic temple of Phœnician origin, and that its builders were in turn descended from the Trojans and originally from the East. Many of the symbols depicted on the Grotto walls appear to be of Far Eastern origin: the Tree of Life, snakes, Buddha, Ganesha and other Eastern symbols have been identified among the many designs crowding the Grotto's walls.





BOTH PIX: COLIN BOWLING

More recently, Sarah Vickery conducted an experiment that reinforces the theory that the Grotto is indeed a pre-Christian, pagan temple. She fitted mirrors round the dome to reflect the sunlight coming through the top on Midsummer's Day. She was delighted to find the light shone directly onto the 'altar'.

Some will not entertain the idea that the Grotto is ancient, maintaining that it is a far more recent folly or, at the very earliest, of Roman construction. One theory is that Isaac Newton built it as a meeting place for a secret society; another suggests the Knights Templar; HG Wells believed it to date to several thousand years BC. The site is near Dane Hill which, legend has it, was the site of a great battle between the Saxons and the Danes, but is far more likely to have been simply an open space where nets were dried. The cave itself could have been a dene-hole, a kind of chalk pit mostly found in those parts of Kent and Essex along the Thames estuary. These, though associated with the Danes because of their name, may well have been excavated in prehistoric times; their use is still a mystery. One, at Hangman's Wood near Grays in Essex, is of particular interest as it is not just a single shaft but has a trefoil formation reminiscent of some prehistoric temples. Such a cave could well have been enlarged at a later date for some purpose.

So, if – as the sceptics suggest – the Grotto is *not* an ancient site, why was it hidden and forgotten for so long? Shell work was known to the Romans, and the cement used on the walls does appear to be similar to that used at that time. The Romans, however, were great record-keepers, so why is there no documentary evidence of the existence of the Grotto? Such a work could hardly have gone unnoticed. A large number of people must have been employed in its construction over a long period of time; this would have been an expensive business, too, even with slave labour. After the square 'altar' chamber was damaged by a bomb in the last war a local person – I believe it was the then-owner – reconstructed a small section, an area less than 2ft (60cm) square; it took her six months, not including the time taken to collect the shells. And, as it is so definitely pagan, with no trace of Christianity, what reason would there have been to keep it secret?

A place of worship might conceivably have been kept hidden, but a folly is meant to be seen. In any case, the construction of such a place would have aroused interest; it's hardly likely that all the locals were sworn to secrecy and every document relating to the project burnt. And, then, why would a folly have been built in an open piece of pasture that had no connection with any large house or stately home?

A commemorative panel was made to mark the 150th anniversary of the Grotto's discovery, allowing us to see how the shells, in all the glory of their original bright colours, would have appeared to those who first put them in place; clearly, whoever they were, the builders of the Grotto cared far more than we do today.

I am convinced that the Grotto is a sacred site. For what other reason would its unknown builders collect millions of shells of 28 different kinds – which came, apparently, not from Margate itself but from Shellness in Pegwell Bay – and create such elaborate designs with them?

The Grotto was probably constructed at least 2,000 years ago, possibly as long as 4,000 years; but until someone takes up the cause and obtains sufficient funding to conduct a detailed investigation, we shall get no closer to the truth. Many problems have yet to be solved. It has proved impossible, for instance, to carbon-date any of the shells, as they are so contaminated by carbon from the oil and gas lamps used to illuminate the Grotto for visitors over the years; nor has it been possible to exactly replicate the cement used, which appears to have been, rather strangely, applied directly onto the chalk.

While we may never be certain of the true origins of this remarkable and still-mysterious underground structure, at least in making the attempt we might be able to get an under-appreciated English treasure the recognition it deserves.

Whatever you think, do come and see the Grotto for yourself. FT

The Shell Grotto is on Grotto Hill, Margate, Kent, about five minutes' walk from the seafront. It is open every day from Good Friday to Hallowe'en, 10am–5pm, in Winter on weekends only, 11am–4pm, and closed over Christmas and New Year. Admission prices are £2.50 for adults, £1.50 for children or £7 for a family ticket (two adults and two children). Children aged three and under are free.

Notes

[1] The main newspaper report account seems to have been a brief report in the *Dover Telegraph* of 1838 (and later quoted in *John Bull* of the same year), referring to "a singular discovery made at The Dane, Margate, of an extensive grotto. It extends to a good distance under the hill, and is laid out in serpentine walks, alcoves and passages of considerable extent: the sides being studded with shells, formed into elaborate and curious devices, and doubtless executed by torchlight."

SOURCES

Howard Bridgewater, *The Grotto* (Fourth Edition), Truprint Litho Ltd 1957.

Sylvia P Beamon (ed), *Undeiground Mythology*, Able Publishing 2002.

www.shellgrotto.co.uk.

Author biography

MARY DERRIMAN served in the Women's Land Army in WWII, studied horticulture and ran a riding school. She has written for many magazines, and is in the Romantic Novelists' Association and a local writing group.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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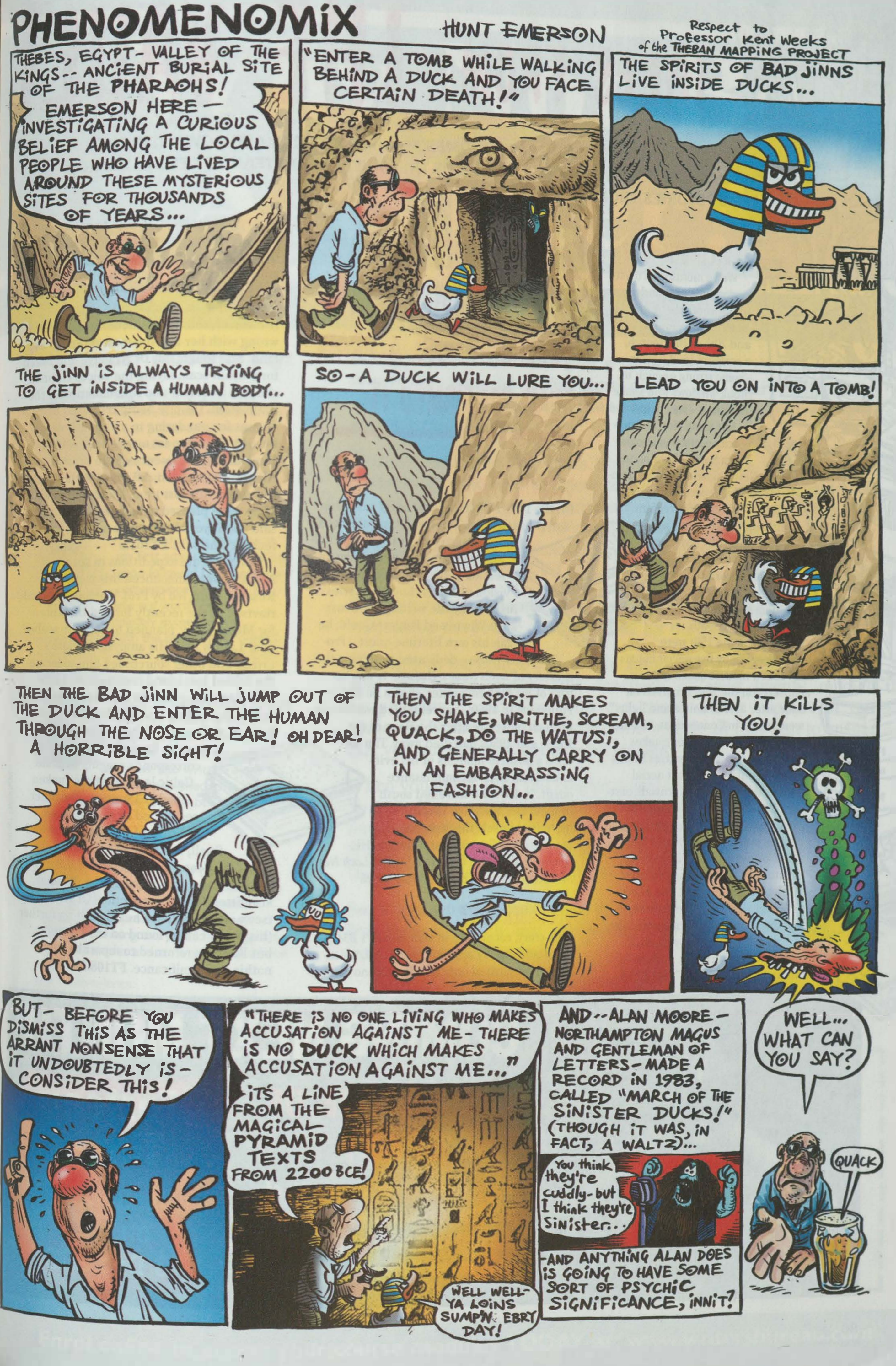
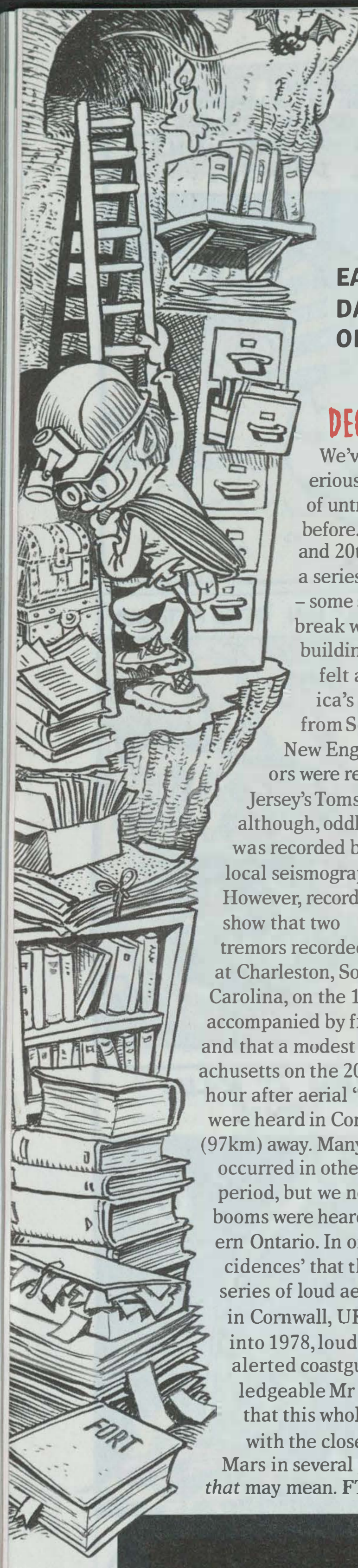

PHENOMENOMIX
HUNT EMERSON
Respect to Professor Kent Weeks of the THEBAN MAPPING PROJECT
THEBES, EGYPT- VALLEY OF THE KINGS-- ANCIENT BURIAL SITE OF THE PHARAOHS!
EMERSON HERE — INVESTIGATING A CURIOUS BELIEF AMONG THE LOCAL PEOPLE WHO HAVE LIVED AROUND THESE MYSTERIOUS SITES FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS...
"ENTER A TOMB WHILE WALKING BEHIND A DUCK AND YOU FACE CERTAIN DEATH!"
THE SPIRITS OF BAD JINNS LIVE INSIDE DUCKS...
THE JINN IS ALWAYS TRYING TO GET INSIDE A HUMAN BODY...
SO - A DUCK WILL LURE YOU...
LEAD YOU ON INTO A TOMB!
THEN THE BAD JINN WILL JUMP OUT OF THE DUCK AND ENTER THE HUMAN THROUGH THE NOSE OR EAR! OH DEAR! A HORRIBLE SIGHT!
THEN THE SPIRIT MAKES YOU SHAKE, WRITHE, SCREAM, QUACK, DO THE WATUSI, AND GENERALLY CARRY ON IN AN EMBARRASSING FASHION...
THEN IT KILLS YOU!
BUT- BEFORE YOU DISMISS THIS AS THE ARRANT NONSENSE THAT IT UNDOUBTEDLY IS - CONSIDER THIS!
"THERE IS NO ONE LIVING WHO MAKES ACCUSATION AGAINST ME - THERE IS NO DUCK WHICH MAKES ACCUSATION AGAINST ME..."
IT'S A LINE FROM THE MAGICAL PYRAMID TEXTS FROM 2200 BCE!
WELL WELL- YA LOINS SUMP'N EBRY DAY!
AND -- ALAN MOORE - NORTHAMPTON MAGUS AND GENTLEMAN OF LETTERS - MADE A RECORD IN 1983, CALLED "MARCH OF THE SINISTER DUCKS!" (THOUGH IT WAS, IN FACT, A WALTZ)...
You think they're cuddly - but I think they're Sinister..
- AND ANYTHING ALAN DOES IS GOING TO HAVE SOME SORT OF PSYCHIC SIGNIFICANCE, INNIT?
WELL... WHAT CAN YOU SAY?
QUACK

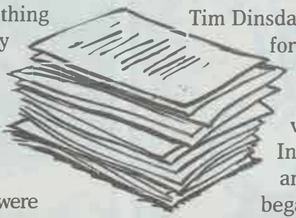


TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

DECEMBER 1977

We've mentioned mysterious aerial sounds of untraceable origin before. Between the 1st and 20th of this month, a series of loud booms – some strong enough to break windows and shake buildings – was heard and felt along North America's eastern seaboard from South Carolina to New England. Ground tremors were reported from New Jersey's Toms River region although, oddly, nothing was recorded by any local seismograph. However, records show that two tremors recorded at Charleston, South Carolina, on the 15th were accompanied by five aerial booms and that a modest quake in Massachusetts on the 20th occurred an hour after aerial "noises and lights" were heard in Connecticut, 60 miles (97km) away. Many other quakes occurred in other countries in this period, but we note that aerial booms were heard at Cornwall, eastern Ontario. In one of those 'coincidences' that thrill us forteans, a series of loud aerial booms began in Cornwall, UK, on 21 Dec and into 1978, loud enough to have alerted coastguards. The knowledgeable Mr X pointed out that this whole period coincides with the closest approach of Mars in several years… whatever *that* may mean. **FT24:47–50; 27:10**



VOICES IN HER HEAD TOLD 'AB' SHE HAD A TUMOUR – AND A BRAIN SCAN CONFIRMED IT

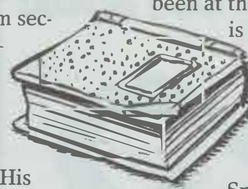
DECEMBER 1987

On the 14th, *FT*'s friend and early supporter Tim Dinsdale died. Tim was a typical English fortean, courteous, honest and scholarly, a pragmatic engineer by profession yet driven by a romantic vision of "marvellous mysteries". Inspired by the writings of Constance Whyte and Rupert Gould, he began his own lifetime quest – *Project Water Horse* – dedicated to solving the mystery of Loch Ness sightings. It was his film of his first encounter, shown on BBC's *Panorama* in 1960, that rekindled worldwide interest in Nessie after the flaps of the 1930s and 1950s had died away. Tim secured a positive analysis of his evidence by an RAF reconnaissance outfit. In 1977, he travelled south to meet Doc Shiels to investigate for himself the Morgawr reports from Cornwall and Devon. His books include the highly regarded *Loch Ness Monster* (1961, revised 1982). **FT50:6**

DECEMBER 1997

This story, recounted in this month's *BMJ*, is astonishing by any reckoning. A London woman identified only as AB, with no history of medical problems, began to hear a voice while reading quietly at home. Seeking help, she went to Dr I Azuonye, a consultant psychiatrist at Lambeth NHS Trust… and seemed cured after medication and counselling. Later, on holiday, she heard *two* voices, telling her there was something wrong with her and she must return to England. She sought out Dr Azuonye and asked for a brain scan, saying the voices claimed she had a tumour and inflammation of the brain stem. Despite being criticised by colleagues for pandering to a patient's delusions, Dr Azuonye set up the scan, which confirmed the presence of the tumour. After the operation, AB reported hearing the voices one last time, Dr Azuonye said. They were pleased to have helped her and said goodbye. AB has since made a full recovery, he said. **FT108:6**

Two separate expeditions in search of Atlantis were announced this month. A Russian team, led by Prof. Viatcheslav Koudriavtsev of the recently formed Institute for Metahistory, planned to map the seabed near Land's End. His analysis of Plato's *Critias* and other sources led him to locate the fabled lost island continent on Little Sole Bank, an undersea hill that crests just below the surface and which would have been at the mouth of the ancient river that is now the English Channel. This corresponds roughly with old Celtic legends of the sunken land of Lyonesse. The other search, led by that intrepid English explorer John Blashford-Snell, was headed for a five-mile (8km)-long Lake Poopo in the Peruvian-Bolivian altiplano, which he claimed also fitted Plato's description. Of Koudriavtsev's efforts we have heard nothing further (his paper can be found on the Internet), but Blashers returned to report he found nothing of significance. **FT108:7**



HUNT EMERSON

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

Sixty years after the death of Aleister Crowley, we assess his life and legacy in a special edition of *Fortean Times*

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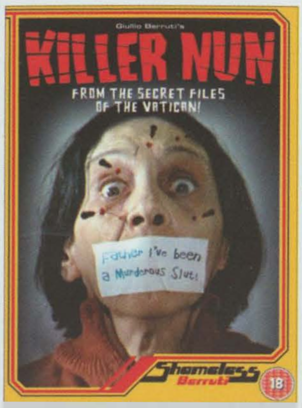
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